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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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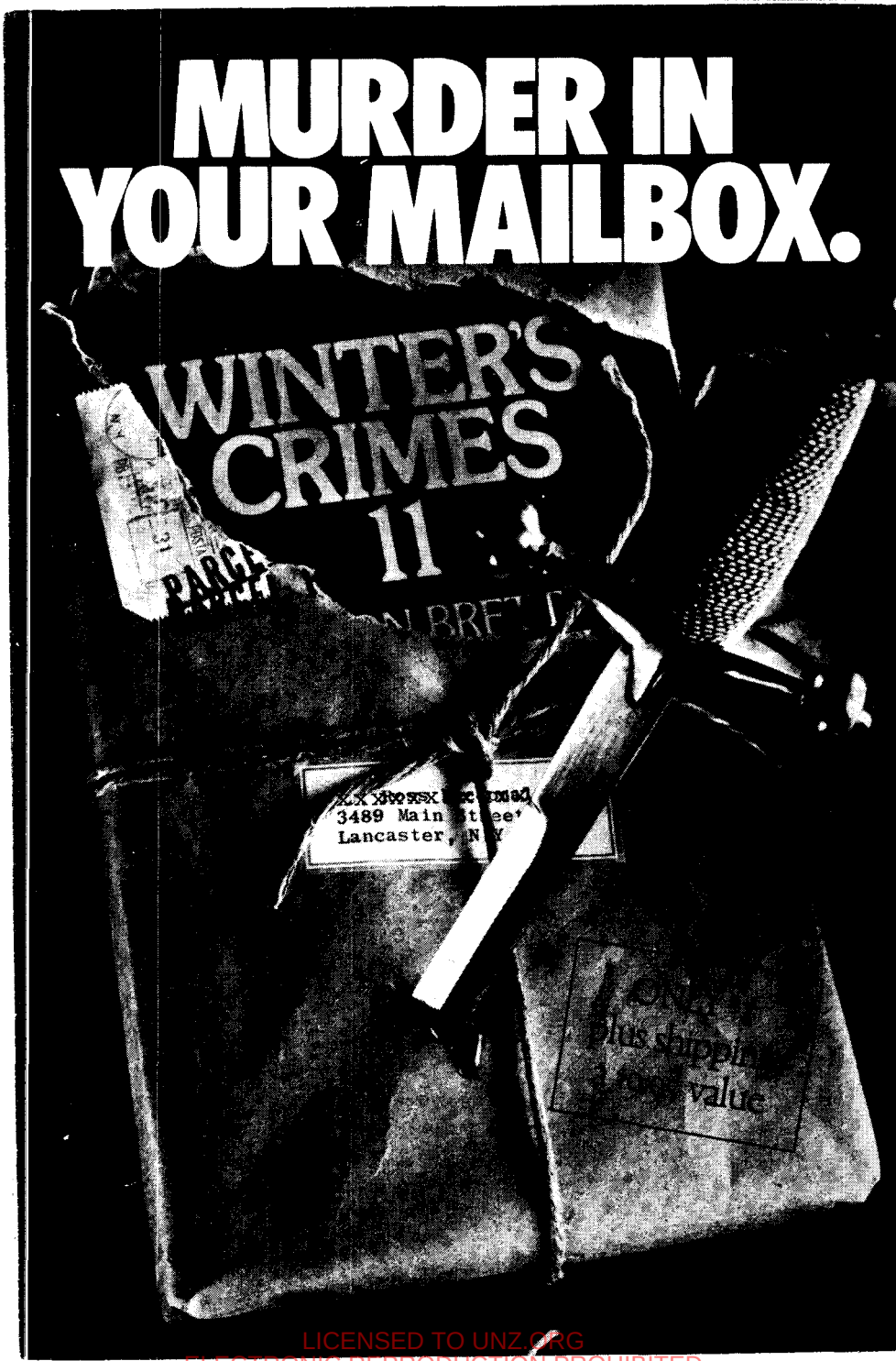

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Every once in a while mystery writers turn surveyors and map out a 'tec territory all their own. Some of the hardboiled writers selected cities—Dashiell Hammett left his heart in San Francisco, Raymond Chandler in Los Angeles. Ellery Queen staked their claim in Wrightsville, U.S.A.

Dick Francis has chosen a background as his 'tec turf—horse racing—and this locale now belongs to him, tack, track, and toteboard . . .

THE DAY OF THE LOSERS

by DICK FRANCIS

Austin Dartmouth Glenn set off to the Grand National with three hundred pounds in his pocket and a mixture of guilt and bravado in his mind. Austin Dartmouth Glenn knew perfectly well that he had promised on his immortal soul and his mother's sainted memory (and other similar trifles) that he would not, he would positively not, put into premature circulation various banknotes which were of intense interest to the police.

Not for five years; he had been sternly warned. Five years would see the heat off. In five years the multimillion robbery would be ancient history; the police would be chasing more recent villains; the hot serial numbers would have faded into fly-blown obscurity on out-of-date lists. In five years it would be safe to spend the fifteen

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thousand smackers he had been paid for his part in springing the big bold bank-robbing boss out of unwelcome jail.

That was all very well, Austin told himself aggrievedly, looking out of the train window at the flying countryside. What about inflation? What about that, then? In five years' time, fifteen thousand might not be worth the paper it was printed on. Or they might even, as in the past, change the colour and size of fivers; he'd heard of a frantic safe-blower who'd done twelve years and gone home to a cache full of the old thin white stuff. All that time served for a load of out-of-date uncashable rubbish. Austin Glenn's mouth twisted in sympathy at the thought. It wasn't going to happen to *him*, he promised himself. Not ruddy well likely.

Austin had paid for his train ticket with ordinary currency, and ditto for the cans of beer, packages of cellophaned sandwiches, and copy of the *Sporting Life*, with which he passed the journey. The hot three hundred were stowed away safely in an inner pocket, not to be risked before he reached the bustling anonymity of the huge crowd converging on Aintree racecourse, Liverpool, England. He was no fool, of course, he thought complacently. A neat pack of sixty fivers, crisp, new, and consecutive, might catch the most incurious eye: but no one would look twice now that he had shuffled them thoroughly and crinkled them well with hands especially dirtied for the purpose.

He wiped beer off his mouth with the back of his hand: a scrawny fortyish man with neat, thin grey-black hair, restless eyes, and an overall air of self-importance. A life spent on the fringes of crime had given him hundreds of dubious acquaintances, an intricate memory-bank of information, and a sound knowledge of how to solicit bribes without actually cupping the palm. No one liked him very much, but Austin Dartmouth Glenn was not sensitive enough to notice.

Nearer the front of the same train Jerry Springwood sat and sweated on three counts. For one thing, he was an outdoor man, and found the train heat excessive, and for another, owing to alcohol and sex, he had no time to spare and would very likely lose his job if he arrived late; but above all, he sweated from fear.

Jerry Springwood, at thirty-two, had lost his nerve, and was trying to carry on the trade of steeplechase jockey without anyone finding out. The old days, when he used to ride with a cool brain and discount intermittent bangs as merely a nuisance, were long gone. For months now he had travelled with dread to the meetings, imagining

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sharp ends of bone protruding from his skin; imagining a smashed face or a severed spine; imagining pain.

For months he had been unable to take risks he would once not have seen as risks at all. For months he had been unable to urge his mounts forward into gaps, when only such urging would win; and unable to stop himself steadying his mounts to jump, when only kicking them on would do. The skill which had taken him to the top was now used to cover the cracks, and the soundness of his long-time reputation bolstered the explanations for defeat which he gave to owners and trainers. Only the most discerning saw the disguised signs of disintegration, and fewer still had put private doubts into private words. The great British public, searching the list of Grand National runners for inspiration, held good old Jerry Springwood to be a plus factor in favour of the third favourite, Haunted House.

A year ago, he reflected drearily, as he stared out at the passing March fields, he would have known better than to go to a sultry party in London on the night before the big race. A year ago he had stayed near the course, drank maybe a couple of beers, gone to bed early, slept alone. He wouldn't have dreamed of making a four-hour dash south in the evening after Friday's racing, or getting drunk, or going to bed at two with a girl he'd known three hours. He hadn't needed to blot out the thought of Saturday afternoon's marathon, but had looked forward to it with zest, excitement, and unquenchable hope.

Oh God, he thought despairingly, what has happened to me?

He was small and strong, with wiry mid-brown hair, deep-set eyes, and a nose flattened by too much fast contact with the ground. A farmer's son, natural with animals, and with social manners sophisticated by success. People usually liked Jerry Springwood, but he was too unassuming to notice.

The crowds poured cheerfully into Aintree racecourse, primed with hope, faith, and cash. Austin peeled off the first of the hot fivers at the turnstiles, and contentedly watched it being sucked into the anonymity of the gate receipts. He safely got change for another in a crowded bar, and for a third from a stall selling form sheets. Money for old rope, he thought sardonically. It didn't make sense, holding on to the stuff for five years.

The Tote, as usual, had opened its windows an hour before the first race to take bets on the Grand National, because there was not time after the second to sell tickets to all who wanted to buy for the

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big third. There were long queues already when Austin went along to back his fancy, for like him they knew from experience that it was best to bet early if one wanted a good vantage point on the stands. He waited in the shorter queue for the five-pound window, writing his proposal on his racecard.

When his turn came he said, "Fifty to win, number twelve," and counted off the shuffled fivers without a qualm.

The busy woman behind the window gave him his tickets with barely a glance.

"Next?" she said enquiringly, looking over his shoulder to the man behind.

Dead easy, thought Austin smugly, stuffing his tickets into his jacket pocket. Fifty on number twelve, to win. No point in messing about with place money, he always said. Mind you, he was a pretty good judge of form: he always prided himself on that. Nothing in the race had a better chance than the third favourite, Haunted House, and you couldn't want a better jockey than Springwood, now could you? He strolled with satisfaction back to the bar and bought another beer.

In the changing-room Jerry Springwood had no difficulty in disguising either his hangover or his fear. The other jockeys were gripped with the usual pre-National tension, finding their mouths a little dry, their thoughts a little abstracted, their flow of ribald jokes slowed to a trickle. Twice over Becher's, Jerry thought hopelessly: the Canal Turn: the Chair: how in God's name am I going to face it?

The Senior Steward of the Jockey Club was lunching a party of eminent overseas visitors in a private dining-room when Chief Superintendent Crispin interrupted the roast saddle of lamb.

"I want to speak to you urgently, sir," the policeman said, bending down to the Turf's top ear.

Sir William Westerland rested his bland gaze briefly on the amount of brass on the navy-blue uniform.

"You're in charge here?"

"Yes, sir. Can we talk privately?"

"I suppose so, if it's important." Sir William rose, glanced regretfully at his half-eaten lunch, and led the policeman through double glass doors to the outdoor section of his private box high in the grandstand. The two men stood hunched in the chilly air, and spoke

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against the background noise of the swelling crowd and the shouts of the bookmakers offering odds on the approaching first race.

Crispin said, "It's about the Birmingham bank robbery, sir."

"But that happened more than a year ago," Westerland protested.

"Some of the stolen notes have turned up here today, on the racecourse."

Westerland frowned, not needing to be told details. The blasting open of the supposed-to-be-impregnable vault, the theft of upwards of three and a half million, the violent getaway of the thieves, all had been given wider coverage than the death of Nelson. Four men, a small boy, and a dog had been killed by the explosion outwards of the bank wall, and three housewives and two young policemen had been gunned down later. The thieves had arrived in a fire engine before the crashing echoes died, had dived immediately into the ruins to carry out all the vault's contents for "safekeeping," and driven clear away with the loot, suspected only at the very last moment by a puzzled constable, whose orders to halt had been answered by a spray of machine-gun bullets.

Only one of the gang had been recognized, caught, tried, and sentenced to thirty years; and of that he had served precisely thirty days before making a spectacular escape. Recapturing him, and catching his confederates, was still a number one police priority, coast to coast.

"It's the first lead we've had for months," Crispin said earnestly. "If we can catch whoever came here with the hot money . . ."

Westerland looked down at the scurrying thousands. "Pretty hopeless, I'd have thought," he said.

"No, sir," Crispin shook his neat greying head. "A sharp-eyed checker in the Tote stopped one of the notes, and now they've found nine more. One of the sellers in the five pound windows remembers selling fifty pounds worth of tickets early on to a man who paid in fivers which *felt* new although they had been roughly creased and wrinkled."

"But even so . . ."

"She remembers he backed only one horse to win, which is unusual on Grand National day."

"Which horse?"

"Haunted House, sir. And so, sir, if Haunted House wins, our fellow will bring his batch of fifty quid's worth of winning tickets to the pay-out, and we will have him."

"But," Westerland objected, "what if Haunted House *doesn't* win?"

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Crispin gazed at him steadily. "We want you to arrange that Haunted House *does* win, sir. We want you to fix the Grand National."

Down in Tattersall's enclosure Austin Dartmouth Glenn passed two hot fivers to a bookmaker who stuffed them busily into his satchel without looking. A tenner to win Spotted Tulip, at eight to one. In the noise, haste, and flurry of the last five minutes before the first race, Austin was as unnoticeable as an ant. He elbowed his way up the stands to find the best view of his money on the hoof, smirking with satisfaction.

In the changing-room Jerry Springwood reluctantly climbed into his thin white breeches and fumbled with the buttons of his shiny red and white striped colours. His mind was filling like a well with panic, the terrible desire to cut and run growing deeper and deadlier with every passing minute. He had difficulty in concentrating and virtually did not hear when anyone spoke to him. His hands trembled. He felt cold. There was another hour to live through before he would have to force himself out to the parade ring, on to the horse, down to the start, and right round those demanding four and a half miles and over thirty huge fences. I can't do it, he thought numbly. I can't face it. Where can I hide?

The four Stewards in charge of the meeting sat gloomily round their large table, reacting with varying degrees of incredulity and uneasiness to the urgings of Chief Superintendent Crispin.

"There's no precedent," said one. "It's out of the question."

"There isn't time," said another.

"You'd never get the trainers to agree," said a third.

"And what about the owners?" asked the fourth.

Crispin held racing in as little esteem as crooked politicians and considered that catching the Birmingham mob was of greater social importance than any particular horse finishing first. His inner outrage at the obstructive reaction of the Stewards seeped unmistakably into his voice.

"The Birmingham robbers murdered ten people," he said forcefully. "Everyone has a public duty to help the police catch them."

"Surely not to the extent of ruining the Grand National," insisted the Stewards.

"I understand," Crispin said, "that in steeplechasing in general few stud values are involved, and in this year's National the horses

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are all geldings. It is not as if we were asking you to spoil the Stud Book by fixing the Derby."

"All the same, it would be unfair on the betting public," said the Stewards.

"The people who died were part of the betting public. The next people to die, in the next violent bank raid, will also be the betting public."

Sir William Westerland listened to the arguments with his bland expression unimpaired. He had gone far in life by not declaring his views before everyone else had bared their breasts, their opinions, and their weaknesses. His mild subsequent observations had a way of being received as revealed truth, when they were basically only unemotional common sense.

He watched Crispin and his fellow Stewards heat up into emphasis and hubbub, and begin to slide towards prejudice and hostility. He sighed internally, looked at his watch, and noisily cleared his throat.

"Gentlemen," he said calmly and distinctly. "Before we reach a decision, I think we should consider the following points. First, possibility. Second, secrecy. Third, consequences."

Stewards and policeman looked at him with united relief.

"Jump jockeys," Westerland said, "are individualists. Who do you think is going to persuade them to fix the race?"

No answer.

"How is anyone to guarantee that Haunted House will not fall?"

No answer.

"How long do you suppose it would be before someone told the Press? Do we want the uproar which would follow?"

No answer, but a great shaking of stewardly heads.

"But if we refuse Chief Superintendent Crispin's request, how do we feel if another bank is blown apart, and more innocent people are killed, and we took no action to prevent it?"

The meeting looked at him in silence, awaiting his lead.

Jerry Springwood's head felt like a balloon floating somewhere above his uncoordinated body. The call of "Jockeys out, please" had found him still unable to think of a way of escape. Too many people knew him. How can I run, he thought; how can I scramble to the gate and find a taxi when everyone knows I should be walking out to ride Haunted House?

Can I faint, he thought? Can I say I'm ill?

He found himself going out with the others, his leaden legs trudg-

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ing automatically while his spirit wilted. He stood in the parade ring with his mouth dry and his eyes feeling like gritty holes in his skull, not hearing the nervously hearty pre-race chit-chat of owner and trainer.

I can't, he thought.

I can't.

The Senior Steward of the Jockey Club, Sir William Westerland, walked up to him as he stood rigidly in his hopeless hell.

"A word in your ear, Jerry," he said.

Jerry Springwood looked at him blankly, with eyes like smooth grey pebbles. Westerland, who had seen that look on other faces and knew what it foreboded, suffered severe feelings of misgiving. He had come to the conclusion (and in spite of Crispin's agonized opposition, had secured the Stewards' wholehearted agreement) that not even to catch murderers could racing's top authorities secretly organize the outcome of the Grand National. Both practically and morally, it was impossible. The police would just have to keep a sharper check on future meetings, and one day soon, perhaps, they would catch their fish as he swam again to the Tote.

All the same, Westerland had seen no harm in wishing Jerry Springwood success; but he perceived now that Crispin had no chance of catching his man today. No jockey in this state of frozen fear could win the National. The backers of Haunted House would be fortunate if their fancy lasted half a mile before he pulled up, or ran out, or refused to jump because of the stranglehold on his reins.

"Good luck," said Westerland lamely, with regret.

Jerry made no answer, even ordinary politeness being beyond him.

Up on his vantage point on the stands, Austin Glenn watched the long line of runners walk down the course. Ten minutes to race time, with half the bookies suffering from sore throats and the massed crowds buzzing with rising excitement. Austin Glenn, who had lost his tenner on Spotted Tulip in the first, and fifteen more to bookmakers on the second, was biting his knuckles over Haunted House.

Jerry Springwood sat like a sack in the saddle, shoulders hunched. The horse, receptive to his rider's mood, plodded along in confusion, not able to sort out whether or not he should respond to the crowd instead. To Austin Glenn and many others horse and rider looked like a grade one losing combination. William Westerland shook his head ruefully, and Crispin wondered irritably why that one horse, of all of them, looked half asleep.

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Jerry Springwood got himself lined up for the start by blotting out every thought. The well of panic was full and trying to flood over. Jerry, white and clammily sweating, knew that in a few more minutes he would have to dismount and run.

Have to.

When the starter let them go, Haunted House was standing flat-footed. Getting no signal from the saddle, he started hesitantly after the departing field, knowing his job, knowing that he was there to run and jump and get his head in front of all the rest, but feeling rudderless, without the help and direction he was used to. His jockey stayed on board by instinct, the long years of skill coming to his aid, the schooled muscles acting in a pattern that needed no conscious thought.

Haunted House jumped last over the first fence, and was still last five fences later, approaching Becher's. Jerry Springwood saw the horse directly in front of him fall, and knew remotely that if he went straight on he would land on top of him. Almost without thinking he twitched his right hand on the rein, and Haunted House, taking fire from this tiniest sign of life, swerved a yard, bunched his quarters, and put his great equine soul into clearing the danger.

Haunted House knew the course: had won there, with Jerry Springwood up, in shorter races. His sudden surge over Becher's melted his jockey's defensive blankness and thrust him into freshly vivid fear. Oh God, Jerry thought, as Haunted House took him inexorably towards the Canal Turn, how can I? How can I?

He sat there, fighting his panic, while Haunted House carried him surefootedly round the Turn, and over Valentine's, and all the way to the Chair. Two miles done; two and a half to go. Jerry thought forever after that he'd shut his eyes as his mount took the last few strides towards the most testing steeplechase fence in the world, but Haunted House met it perfectly and cleared the huge spread without the slightest stumble.

Over the water jump in front of the stands, and out again towards Becher's, with the whole course to jump again. Jerry thought, if I pull up now, I'll have done enough. How can I go on? Surely I've done enough?

Horses beside him tired and stopped or slid and fell, but Haunted House galloped at a steady thirty miles an hour with scant regard for his fate, and took heart from the signals reaching him from his rider's hands and heels and knees, however faint they might be. Haunted House, like all great 'chasers, positively loved to race.

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Austin Glenn on the stands, and William Westerland in his private box, and Chief Superintendent Crispin tense in front of a television set, all watched with faster pulses as Haunted House made his progress through the field. By the time he reached Becher's on the second circuit he lay tenth, and seventh at the Canal Turn, and fifth after the third last fence, a mile from home.

Jerry Springwood saw a gap on the rails and didn't take it, and checked his mount before the second last fence so that they jumped it safely but lost two lengths. On the stands William Westerland groaned aloud, but on Haunted House Jerry Springwood just shrivelled inside at his own fearful cowardice. It's useless, he thought, I'd be better off dead.

The leader of the field had sprinted a long way ahead, and Jerry saw him rise over the last fence while Haunted House was a good forty lengths in the rear. One more, Jerry thought. Only one more fence. I'll never ride another race. Never.

He locked his jaw as Haunted House gathered his muscles and launched his half-ton weight at the green-faced birch. If he rolls on me, Jerry thought . . . if I fall and he crashes on top of me . . . Oh God, he thought, take me safely over this fence.

The horse in front, well-backed and high in the handicap, took the last flat half-mile at a spanking gallop. Jerry Springwood and Haunted House, still on their feet, had left it too late to make a serious bid to catch them, but with a surge of what Jerry knew to be release from purgatory they raced past everything else in a flat-out dash to the post.

Austin Glenn watched Haunted House finish second by twenty lengths. Cursing himself a little for not bothering about place money, he took out his tickets, tore them philosophically across, and let the pieces flutter away to the four winds.

William Westerland rubbed his chin and wondered whether Jerry Springwood could have won if he'd tried sooner. Chief Superintendent Crispin bitterly cursed the twenty lengths by which his quarry would escape.

Sir William took his eminent foreign visitors down to watch the scenes of jubilation round the winner in the unsaddling enclosure, and was met by flurried officials with horrified faces.

"The winner can't pass the scales," they said.

"What do you mean?" Westerland demanded.

"The winner didn't carry the right weight! The trainer left the weight-cloth hanging in the saddling box when he put the saddle

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on his horse. The winner ran all the way with ten pounds less than he should have . . . and we'll have to disqualify him."

Forgetting the weight-cloth was done often enough; but in the National! . . . Westerland took a deep breath and told the aghast officials to relay the facts to the public over the tannoy system.

Jerry Springwood heard the news while he was himself sitting on the scales and watching the pointer swing round to the right mark. He felt, not joyful, but overwhelmingly ashamed, as if he'd won the prize by cheating. I don't deserve it, he thought painfully. Haunted House won the race, but I failed.

Crispin stationed his men strategically, and alerted all the Tote pay-out windows to signal them immediately the tell-tale tickets were presented.

Up on the stands, Austin Glenn searched for the pieces in a fury, picking up every torn and trampled scrap and peering at it anxiously. He was not alone in having disregarded the punters' rule of not throwing tickets away until after the all-clear from the weigh-in, but to see others searching as hard as he was gave him no pleasure. What if someone else picked up his tickets, and claimed his winnings? The idea enraged him; and what was more, he couldn't stay on the course indefinitely because he had to catch his return train. He couldn't afford to be late; he had work to do that night.

Crispin's men shifted from foot to foot as time went by, and were left there growing more and more conspicuous while the crowd thinned and trooped out through the gates. When the Tote closed for the day the Chief Superintendent called them off in frustrated rage, and conceded they would have to wait for another day.

In the weighing-room Jerry Springwood bore the congratulations as best he could, and announced to surprised television millions that he would be hanging up his boots in a few weeks, at the end of the season. He didn't realize that he had ridden the bravest race of his life, and when the plaudits were over he locked himself in the lavatory and wept for his lost courage.

Austin Dartmouth Glenn travelled home empty-handed and in a vile mood. He cursed his wife and kicked the cat, and after a hasty supper he put on his neat navy-blue uniform and went off scowling to work his usual night shift as a warder in the nearby high-security jail.

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a *NEW* cop story by

JOHN H. DIRCKX

How trustworthy is the average witness's testimony? "The deaf man heard the dumb man say that the blind man saw the lame man run." But the waitress in the diner wasn't deaf or dumb or blind . . .

EYES THAT SEE, EARS THAT HEAR

by JOHN H. DIRCKX

It was already dark—around ten, the coroner said—when Herbert French, having kept an appointment in Kirtland Park with some person unknown, died of a stab wound in the heart. French was the town drunk who had been in and out of police court all his life. Although there was no evidence that he'd ever paid any local taxes, the discovery of his body soon after sunrise set the full machinery of our public justice in operation—namely, Officer Spoerl—to solve and avenge French's murder.

For premeditated murder it almost certainly was. French's wallet and personal effects were untouched. A careful search at the scene failed to turn up the weapon, but Officer Spoerl found, caught in a wire fence at some distance, two crumpled paper napkins stained with blood. The murderer had evidently used one of them to wipe the knife, the other to wipe his hands. There was no hope of recovering fingerprints from the napkins, but they bore what might be a clue—the imprint of Carny's Diner.

Officer Spoerl recognized the name of the diner. It was the only one in town, a block from the park, and both the murderer and his victim must have passed it on the way to their meeting. Spoerl dug

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up an old mug shot of French at headquarters and dropped in at the diner around three in the afternoon. The place was almost deserted. Spoerl knew that Carny's did a fairly brisk trade at mealtimes —probably more at lunch than at dinner, since it was close to the only industrial plant in town.

He took a stool at the counter. Even though things were slack, the only waitress in sight showed no particular interest in serving him. Spoerl laid his badge and ID on the counter and cleared his throat.

Hi! I'm Tanya. May I serve you? That's what the cloth name-tag stitched on her blouse said. What she said was, "You want coffee?"

"Yes. Black. I'm—" But she'd already drifted away to the coffee machine.

She returned with coffee, a paper napkin, and a plastic spoon. "Anything else?"

"I'm a police officer, miss." She inspected his badge out of the corner of her eye. "Mind telling me if you've ever seen this man?"

She held the mug shot at various angles, shielding her eyes from the glare of the fluorescent lights. "I dunno. Maybe. What did he do?"

"He got killed last night in the park. Stabbed, around ten o'clock. How late are you open?"

"Mondays? Till ten." She lounged idly against the counter, looking pleased to have an excuse for ignoring the few other customers.

"Were you here until ten last night?"

"Till eleven. We get late supper after we close, and then we have to clean up."

"We found some paper napkins like this near the scene of the murder. They had blood on them, and we figured whoever killed this man was probably in here late last evening. When the murdered man left home he told his brother-in-law he had to meet somebody in the park. Whoever it was might have waited here at the diner until it was about time."

Just when she seemed to be developing an interest in the case, a pair of workmen came in and sat at the far counter. They must have been regulars, because she bobbed away and poured them coffee before they said a word. Once the small-talk started, it didn't let up until they left ten minutes later. In the meantime she'd sped two parting guests, presenting checks, manipulating the cash register, and clearing away dirty dishes in one languorous but subtly efficient operation. Then she came back to Spoerl.

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"More coffee?"

"Yes. And let me have one of those rolls with nuts. I don't suppose you noticed anybody different in here last night?"

"Different from what? I mean, some of these high-school kids are pretty creepy."

"Somebody you never saw before? Or somebody acting funny—nervous, maybe. I guess that's a pretty silly question, isn't it? I mean, you probably don't pay much attention to who comes in when, or what they look like, or how they act."

"Sure I do. That's part of the job. I'm not dumb, you know."

"I didn't mean it that way. It's just that, a lot of times, it seems like waitresses don't notice right away when somebody's waiting to be served, or wants his check, or—"

" 'Course we notice. You can only do one thing at a time. And you've got to plan ahead. I mean, you don't take something clear to the last table in the corner and then come all the way back empty-handed. But we notice, all right."

Spoerl's nod didn't carry much conviction.

"Okay, I'll show you," she said. "I'm looking at you, right? I can't see any of the other customers. At table number five—under the arch—there's a lady about fifty wearing a gray coat with a fur collar. She put on silver-rimmed glasses to read the menu and then put them away in her purse. She smokes Pall Mall Golds. That's her son with her—red-check jacket, jeans, and sneakers. He limps. They're from out of town. They came to see a bone specialist at the medical school in Northfield—"

"They told you all that?" Spoerl interrupted in astonishment.

"They didn't tell me anything. But I couldn't help hearing them talking when I was serving them. And right after they ordered, she used the pay phone to call her husband.

"Over against the wall, by the side window, there's a man about thirty, in a light-green suit. White shirt, no tie, small beard. Couple of cigars in his pocket. He's on an expense account. Works for the government, I think."

"You think?"

"Well, he drove up in that tan Chevy with the parking decal from Leland Air Force Base."

"This is unbelievable! You could run rings around any detective, even Sherlock Holmes! I wouldn't think a waitress would notice that much."

She shrugged. "You can't help noticing. Like I said, it's part of

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the job. You've got to be able to size people up, especially when you're busy. The ones that might slip out without paying, you put as far from the door as you can. You make the ones that aren't going to leave a tip wait while you take care of the ones that are."

"How can you tell who isn't going to leave a tip?"

"You just get to know. Young couples hardly ever tip well. Or a woman who comes in by herself. Or a man who carries an umbrella when it isn't raining."

"Or people who complain about the service or the food?" suggested Spoerl.

"Oh, they tip the best of all. They figure that gives them the right to—"

"Hey, can we get some service over here?" someone called.

She flashed Spoerl a knowing look and hurried away.

When she came back she resumed her survey. Spoerl listened in fascination while she listed details about two other customers. "Did I miss anybody?" she asked when she'd finished.

"Just that chubby guy in the corner with his shirttail half out and a yellow pencil behind his right ear," he said, mimicking her style of description.

"Oh, that isn't anybody. I mean, he's not a customer. That's Harry, the assistant manager."

"Was he here last night?"

"Only until six."

"Is there a head manager?"

"Mr. Carnevale. He's the owner, but we don't see him very often."

"You mean you were on duty alone last night after six?"

"No, Bonnie came in at four thirty."

Again there was an interval while she attended to a customer who had just come in. The pace of business had gradually picked up as the afternoon advanced. She came back in a few minutes and poured Spoerl a third cup of coffee.

"Thanks. I know you're getting busy, but could you remember who was in here last night during the last hour or two before closing, and describe them for me the way you did the people who are in here now? Just the ones who came in alone."

She thought for a moment. "Singles after eight or nine o'clock? There weren't that many—it was Monday. Wait." She went to talk to Harry, who continued stolidly chewing a forkful of pie while he studied Spoerl across the room and then nodded slowly. When she

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came back to Spoerl's place she had a cigar box full of paid checks in small bundles.

"Here's yesterday's. We'll start at the back. This one stayed until closing time. You want him?"

"I guess so. What did he look like?"

She closed her eyes. "Middle-aged, old suit, has a cough. He's been in here before, always late."

"What did he order?"

"Cheeseburger, salad, fries, two coffees."

"Remember anything else about him?"

"Sure. Glasses with wire rims—bifocals. Gray hair, real thin on top, full mustache. Big ring on his left pinkie. Used to handling money—you can tell by the way he counts out the bills when he pays. And—he's a bottle collector."

Spoerl looked up from his notebook. "A what?"

"Bottle collector. That's what we call a customer who asks you for catsup and mustard and salt and French dressing—one thing at a time. By the time they leave, their table's covered with bottles—and your legs are about to buckle."

She turned over another check. "The next one was a couple—middle-aged, fancy clothes. Only she wasn't his wife."

"How could you tell?"

There was something like disdain in the look she gave him as she went on to the next check. "This one was a girl. Bonnie waited on her, but I can tell you about her. She's around my age—say, twenty-five"—Spoerl glanced away quickly—"single, nice dresser, carries a shoulder bag. She comes in a lot. Harry calls her Miss Abyss."

Spoerl repeated the name in a tone of puzzlement.

"No bottom. She works around here someplace—but she's not a secretary. Her nails are too long. And she tips too good, and she gives orders like she spends all day doing it."

"What does she look like?" It didn't sound to Spoerl like someone who would have made an appointment to meet Herbert French in the park, but he took down her description of Miss Abyss anyway.

The next three checks were for groups, then a mousy little man in tweeds who was what the waitresses called a "bookkeeper"—a customer who counts his change, puts away his cash register ticket in his wallet, and figures a tip at exactly ten percent of the check.

"He stayed about an hour, left around a quarter to ten. All he had was coffee. Lots of it. Went in there three times." She indicated the

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men's room with a sideways twitch of her head. "Smoked a lot, *too—filter tips. Dyes his hair—you can tell under these lights.*"

She leafed through several more checks. "Wait a minute, here's another guy that came in by himself and just had coffee. He left about nine thirty. Tan car-coat, jeans. Dark-complexioned, with a big jaw. Short hair, dirty fingernails, and a dirty bandage on his left thumb—like he'd been working on a car or a motorcycle."

Harry had waited on one or two tables after finishing his snack, but now he interrupted and asked her to take care of a family of five who had just come in. When she came back, Spoerl turned down a fourth cup of coffee and asked for his check.

"Is any of what I told you going to help?" she asked. "I mean, do you think one of them killed that man?"

Spoerl nodded. "Yes, I think one of them did. And with your descriptions it ought not to be too hard to find them and bring them in for questioning. Can I ask you one more favor? Here's my name and phone number. If one of those people comes in again, will you give me a call—and make sure they can't hear you using the phone?"

"Sure. I'll call from the office." She put his card in her pocket.

"You know, Tanya, you ought to be giving lectures at a police academy on observation and collecting evidence."

She smiled as she rang up the transaction on the cash register and handed Spoerl his change.

" 'Bye, now. And thanks again." He dashed out without leaving so much as a dime tip.

She'd foreseen that, of course. Cops never did. Served him right that he'd fallen for her shrewd mixture of fact and imagination. But then, if he was any kind of cop he would have hung around another twenty minutes until Bonnie came in—and Tanya. Then he would have found out her name was Mary Jo, and that she'd borrowed Tanya's extra blouse last night after coming back ten minutes late from her second break. He might even have learned that one of the meat knives had been missing when they cleaned up last night, but was back in the drawer this morning.

Mary Jo cleared away the officer's dirty dishes and mopped his place at the counter with a damp rag. Just like a man—building her up with a lot of cheap flattery, getting her to do all his work for him, and then the big kiss-off. Just like that chiseler Herbie French, who spent all the money she'd lent him on booze, and then went out with that tramp Carolyn. And lied about it.

Men! Served him right. Served them both right.

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Dear Reader: Don't read the last two paragraphs too quickly . . .

YOU DON'T NEED AN ENEMY

by ROSE MILLION HEALEY

Sondra Kingsley was murdered last week.

Far be it for me to speak ill of the dead. Let evil be interred with the bones, I always say. But there's no denying Sondra asked for it. She was a reckless one, and that's a fact.

Oh, I know a lot of people called her "good-hearted" and "trusting." That's as may be. Personally, I call it reckless when you make friends with every ragtag and bobtail who hands you a hard-luck story. Robert Browning took his "Last Duchess" to task for letting her "smiles go everywhere." We all know what happened to *that* little lady.

Of course, I didn't tell the reporters or the police that I thought Sondra had it coming to her. It's just that I warned her and warned her against taking everyone at face value.

I'm sitting here in the apartment we shared together. Two nice young policemen are on guard outside. Everyone urged me to quit the premises. However, I'm the original "Iron Butterfly." (That's what I was called in the old days at the studio.) No one is going to kill *me*.

After all the hullabaloo of questioning and interviews (quite like the old days), it's finally quiet. So I'm jotting everything down as fast as I can. (I'll edit it later.) This may seem a heartless thing to do. But it will make an interesting chapter in my autobiography. I'm sure Sondra would have approved. When you come to think of it, this may give her immortality of a sort.

Sondra was never a Star. Even when we were very young and starting out in the theater there was always a sort of settled, homey quality about her.

"Sandy, you need more S.A.," I told her, even then, even when we were kids. (Of course, she was several years my senior.) "You've got to have It if you expect to get anywhere in show biz."

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But she just went her own way. That was Sondra Kingsley. She never would listen to my advice.

You might say that, in the long run, Sondra was proved right. Almost till the day she died, she was still working. While I—well, I certainly wouldn't have wanted to play a grandmother on a TV soap opera the way she did. My career has had its ups and downs, but it's never gone that far down. I'll be up again. Why, as a result of all this publicity, I'll probably be deluged with calls from people who didn't know I was "available."

Anyway, to get back to Sondra. She was a plodding sort. Right from the beginning, in the silents, she was always cast as the good, steady sister, the one the hero went back to after he got scorched by the likes of me.

In real life we played the same parts. I was a hot little number back then, believe you me. Many's the Sheik who found solace with Sondra after he'd Charlestoned a few with me.

I never really blamed her for snagging Leland. After all, he was on the rebound. I had dashed off to Monte Carlo or Nice or somewhere with that Count or the Marquis or someone. How did I know that Leland would wise up and quit the acting profession? He did all right as an agent (most of those ten percenters do). I always felt he put the kibosh on me with the industry. How else can you explain the nose dive my career took in '29? They'll tell you it was my voice. My voice! I've never had any trouble making myself heard!

Anyway, when I got back from my little fling in Europe, sound was in, and I was out. Sondra and Leland got married. They didn't have any kids, so Sondra practically adopted every bit player and extra in Hollywood. I kept reading about her being on committees for this charity and that charity. As the years rolled by, I'd see in magazines and newspapers about how she fostered the careers of dozens of actors. It paid off for her, I'll grant her that. After Leland shuffled off to that Great Casting Office in the Sky, she went back to acting even though Leland had left her well provided for. Unlike *my* so-called friends, hers remembered her and saw to it that she kept busy. I would have been too proud to accept the kind of handout roles she got even if they'd been offered to me. But that was Sondra all over. No pride.

And gullible! I have to laugh when I think how I pulled the wool over her eyes.

She honestly believed that we just happened to run into each other outside Rockefeller Center one evening last September. What a hoot!

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How credulous can you get? She really thought that I was on my uppers and needed a place to sleep for the night. It's true, things hadn't been going too well for me. I'd been between engagements for longer than I might have liked. All the sugar daddies were long gone. I was only waiting for the right role to come along, though. I wasn't any Sondra Kingsley who would snatch at any old part.

Before they'd locked me out of that fleabag I'd been staying in temporarily, I'd caught Sondra's sweet little granny act on television. It occurred to me that if I bumped into her accidentally on purpose she might be good for a small loan. Just to tide me over until I sold my memoirs or heard from some of my contacts. In a way, she owed me. If I hadn't given Leland the air, she would be in Nowheresville.

Imagine my surprise when she practically fell all over me. Had to take me home with her and pile food in front of me. What a dope. If *she* had come to *me*, looking like the Wreck of the Hesperus and whining about old times, I'd have seen through her dodge one-two-three. Boy, I really laid it on thick. And she went for it! Offered me clothes: "Please don't be offended, Lila. I know you don't need them. But winter is coming, and—"

(Not a word about the fact that they'd have to be taken in about a mile. I was always more svelte than Sondra.)

Gave me money: "Till you get back on your feet."

(Baby, it was *off* my feet I wanted to get. And I did.)

Before she knew it, Sondra was offering me the spare bedroom in her apartment: "Just for tonight."

Well, "tonight" lasted almost a year.

During that time I made myself useful without her knowing it. By not answering the telephone when she was out and weeding out the begging letters in her incoming mail I got rid of a lot of the deadbeats she'd surrounded herself with over the years. Some of the others I discouraged by hinting that Sondra had made some bad investments and that I'd had to move in to help her financially. Oh, they made a big show of offering to help her, but I explained how much that would hurt her pride. Her pride!

Far from being grateful for what I'd done, the only thanks I got was Sondra's complaining mildly now and then of her old friends seeming to have forgotten her. "Now you know who your true friend is, Sandy," I said. "Me. Just me."

"Now, Lila, you're very near to me," she chided. "But there are a few others."

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"Name them." I really wanted to know.

"Well, all my dear colleagues at 'The Heart Knows Its Way'—"

I was giving *them* an earful: "The way she's been overworked at her age is shocking, simply shocking," I murmured to cast and crew every chance I got.

"—and Wilbur," Sondra continued. "Wilbur still comes around."

Did he ever. That Wilbur was a thorn in my side. I won't deny it. Nothing I could do or say would keep him away. He'd been hanging around Sondra since the Year One. Long before Leland ever came on our scene, there was Wilbur. Or Willie the Wise as he used to be called in the tabloids. (Willie the Wiseacre, *I'd* call him.)

Willie got the title because he managed to stay hale and hearty and free as air when his business associates were being mowed down by rival mobsters or getting clapped into the clink for income-tax evasion. After Prohibition he went legit—well, he seemed to. There were always rumors that he kept in touch. Nobody'd ever hung anything on him, though. Sondra wouldn't hear a word against him.

"Now, Lila," she reproved me, "there's never been any proof that Willie kept bad company. Even if he did, it's all so long ago. I'm sure he's honest as the day is long now."

She must have had *some* reservations about Willie. Otherwise, why would she keep refusing to marry him? Advanced in years as he may have become, Willie Olney was quite a catch. He had a townhouse and a chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce and owned real estate in Florida and Atlantic City. He'd kept himself looking pretty snappy, too. (He could afford to.) Many's the pretty young thing had a try at landing him. I wouldn't have touched him with a ten-foot pole, of course. Too uncouth for me. Also, I didn't think much of his upper-story no matter how "wise" he was reputed to be. I mean, could a man be dealing from a full deck to have preferred Sondra to me back in the Twenties?

Anyhow, he clearly still preferred her. I don't know why, but he would go out of his way to try to tear me down in her eyes.

He blew his top when he came back from a business trip and found me living with Sondra.

"Sandy," he said while I was right there in the next room. (You could hear everything in that crummy little room.) "I can't let you out of my sight for a week without you go and take in a stray," he fumed. "Dogs and birds I'd understand. But that cat!" (Cat, indeed.) "She was bad news fifty years ago, and her message hasn't changed one iota."

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I complained to Sondra about Willie's maligning me.

Sondra, to do her justice, became very distressed and asked how I knew. And I told her if I had a decent place to sleep, I wouldn't have to lie with my ear up against the wall.

After that she and Willie took to conversing very quietly when he came to call. But he made plenty of noise a few months later. In fact, I thought he was going to have apoplexy when she told him about altering her will in my favor.

"Wilbur, don't take on so," she said in that icky-sticky voice of hers. "There's no one else I know who needs the money so badly. You don't, and my other friends are obviously getting on all right without me. I'm all Lila has."

"If you've got Lila for a friend, you don't need an enemy." Wilbur seemed to think that was a new one.

I let Sondra know what *I* thought as soon as he left.

Sondra fretted, "I do wish you and Wilbur could be kept from upsetting each other. I'm so fond of you both."

The climax came about ten days ago. Sondra informed Wilbur that she had been written out of "The Heart Knows Its Way," so she had decided to take me on a dream trip around the world.

"Whose dream? That conniving little witch of a Lila? She's stealing you away!"

I couldn't take that kind of abuse and came bounding out of my room.

"Oh, Lila dear, you heard," Sondra said, running to me.

"How could I help it?" I began to cry.

(Something I could always do without the help of glycerin or an onion.)

Sondra threw a reproachful glance at Willie. Comforting me in her arms, she soothed, "Poor Lila, I'm so sorry you were disturbed."

"Disturbed!" Willie boomed. "I'd like to disturb her neck from her shoulders." He shook a finger at Sondra. "Mark my words, Sandy, some day your good heart is going to be the death of you. And probably of me!" He slammed out in a fury.

Willie turned out to be quite a prophet. Somebody who had a key to the apartment got in last week and smothered Sondra while she slept. (I've had the locks changed, and nobody's ever getting in here again except me.)

The police are baffled. It's my opinion they'll remain so. Whoever did it was very clever. In fact, the police think it was a professional

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job. They say the method—no noise, no fingerprints, a pillow applied with great strength and then the job finished off with a quick garroting—is one being employed in certain gangland murders throughout the country lately.

As my civic duty I had to mention Willie the Wise's connections. The police investigated, but the gentleman himself was in Tampa at the time. And, as the police pointed out, he wouldn't have any motive for hiring a hit man. Sondra didn't leave him anything. Except a broken heart, I guess. Because when he heard the news, he blew his brains out.

Naturally, I was on the suspect list, since I inherited her estate. But it was obvious to the authorities that I'm much too frail to have committed such a brutal crime. I was peacefully asleep when it happened because Sondra's bedroom is much quieter than my old one. After Willie made such a disturbance that last time, she very kindly offered to change rooms with me.

Poor Sondra. Some friend of hers finally did her in.

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a *NEW* short story by

PATRICIA McGERR

Sheila Rogan was a confirmed coupon clipper—not coupons from Treasury notes or municipal bonds, but from advertisements in newspapers and magazines—coupons representing savings on supermarket purchases. But coupons can sometimes do more than help a tight budget . . .

EVERY LITTER BIT HELPS

by PATRICIA McGERR

A policeman's wife spends a lot of time alone. And if the policeman is head of Homicide, she gets used to delayed dinners and last-minute changes of plan. It helps to have a hobby that she can enjoy by herself and that can be taken up or put down on short notice. Also, in these times of shrinking municipal budgets, it had better not be expensive.

Sheila Rogan found a spare-time activity that fitted all these requirements. In fact, it even made her household funds go further. She clipped coupons. Not the kind that are attached to Treasury notes or corporation bonds but those that appear in newspapers and magazines to be exchanged for discounts at the supermarket.

Beginning casually with the basic "cents-off" coupon, she soon discovered many variations. Buy two, get one free. Proofs of purchase. Premiums. Three cereal boxtops brought her an accordion file in which to organize her clippings according to product and expiration date. Cutting, sorting, checking, mailing—it all provided diversion for the evenings and weekends that her husband was kept away from home on a case. It also added some unusual twists to their menus.

"Why are we on this pizza binge?" Pete asked one night, then

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added quickly, "No, don't tell me. I know the answer. You had a coupon."

"It really does save money," she said. "When I send in five labels I'll get a free serving tray."

"That's great." He grinned at her. "Then you can serve more pizza."

Besides the tray, in less than a year of serious couponing, she acquired three cookbooks, two coffee mugs, a plastic apron, and a miscellaneous collection of gadgets. Long before Christmas she began to scan the ads for premiums that would make amusing small gifts or stocking stuffers for members of her large family. She had a good start on several items by mid-October when they were invited to the gala Saturday-night opening of a museum designed by the architect for whom she worked.

She bought an ankle-length dress of bright yellow satin and said a string of silent prayers that they'd be able to attend the party as planned. Pete was off duty that Saturday but each time the phone rang Sheila tensed, sure that a mass murderer had struck on purpose to spoil their evening. She could hardly believe it when at last Pete stood at the bedroom door, looking very distinguished in a rented tuxedo, car keys in hand, and told her it was time to go.

"My goodness," she breathed, "but you're beautiful."

"That's my line," he returned, "and you really are."

They found a parking space a half block from the museum and walked back. As they approached the corner the street light shone on a brown and white striped paper stuck on one of the prongs of a wire trash basket. Almost without thinking, she took a tissue from her purse, plucked the paper from the basket, and put it, wrapped in the tissue, in her coat pocket.

"What the devil?" Pete stared at her, shaking his head in disbelief; then he hummed a few bars of an old Irving Berlin song and paraphrased, "She wears satins and laces and brings rubbish home. I hope you can explain what you just did. It's one thing to try to keep the sidewalks clean, but when the litter is already in the basket—"

"It's for my brother Mike," she told him. "If I send in forty Chocko-bar wrappers, I'll get a T-shirt marked 'I am a Chocko-holic.' You know how Mike loves chocolate."

"But you're not that crazy about it," he countered. "Forty bars is a pile of candy."

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"That's why I need help from strangers." And she patted her pocket."

The evening was even more gala than expected and Sheila, basking in the memory, could be philosophical when the arrest of a suspect in a month-old homicide took Pete away just before Sunday dinner. While he was gone she counted her candy wrappers. Adding the one from last night made thirty-one. Nine to go, she told herself. If only the Chocko addict in my building hadn't gone on vacation or on a diet or whatever, I'd be almost there.

It was a little over a month since she had started the collection, encouraged by the fact that every day when she came back from lunch there was a fresh Chocko wrapper in the sand-topped urn between the elevators in the lobby of her office building. Half of the wrappers in her pile were from that source. She had formed a mental picture of her anonymous benefactor as a plump jolly woman who, after a low-calorie lunch, put a quarter in the lobby machine and started to eat the candy while she waited for the elevator. Then, last Monday, she returned to the office from lunch to find nothing in the urn except cigarette stubs. It had been the same every day for the rest of the week.

She examined the form that was to accompany the wrappers. Allow four to six weeks for delivery. If Mike is to have his T-shirt for Christmas, I'll have to buy nine bars and eat them in a hurry. But that defeats the whole purpose of couponing. It's designed to save money, not waste it on something I neither need nor want. Maybe I'll become a bag lady and prowl through garbage cans. But even that wouldn't yield many Chocko wrappers. It was a new bar and not yet popular. The sensible thing was to forget the T-shirt and find another gift for Mike. But nothing else, she thought sadly, will be quite that appropriate.

So it was a happy surprise, when, arriving for work early Monday morning, she saw in the urn the familiar brown and white stripes. The Chocko eater is back, she beamed as she carried her tissue-wrapped trophy to her office. If she stays on her daily schedule, I'll be able to send for Mike's shirt next week.

It was a busy morning, punctuated by calls from people offering congratulations on the new museum. It was nearly noon when the uniformed policeman came in. A man had been killed, he explained, and they were questioning everyone in the building.

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"Just a routine check," he added reassuringly, "to see if anybody has information that will help us apprehend the perpetrator."

"A murder? In one of these offices? Who was it?"

"The name was Ross. Henry Ross." He flipped open his notebook and stood with pencil poised. "Did you know him?"

"Only by sight." A stout bald man, she remembered, who never smiled. Head of a firm of tax consultants on the top floor of the eight-story building. "Who is the officer in charge?"

"Captain Rogan of Homicide." As he spoke, his eye caught the name plate on her desk. "Are you related?"

"He's my husband." So Pete is upstairs on a case and I'm a witness. It was a strange feeling.

"Oh." The young policeman blushed, started to close his notebook. "I guess I shouldn't be bothering you."

"Yes, you should." It was her turn to be reassuring. "I'll be glad to answer your questions. That is, if I have any answers."

"Well then." He cleared his throat and became very official. "You're Mrs. Sheila Rogan." He copied it from the name plate. "In room number 518. Were you in this building at any time yesterday?"

"Sunday? No, I wasn't. Is that when it happened?"

"Yes. Although the body wasn't found until this morning."

"How did he die?"

"Pending confirmation from the autopsy, the cause of death is presumed to be a blow on the head with a heavy object."

"Are there any suspects?"

"I don't know, Miss—Mrs. Rogan."

"And I'm supposed to be answering questions, not asking them. Forgive me. I'm not used to being on this side of a murder investigation. But I'm afraid there's nothing I can tell you. I left the office at a little after five on Friday and didn't come back until 8:30 this morning. I didn't think anybody in the building worked on Sunday. I'm surprised Mr. Ross was here."

"You say you knew the deceased by sight?"

"Yes, from passing him in the lobby or riding in the elevator."

"Were you acquainted with any of his employees?"

"Only in passing, just as I was with him. We said good morning or good night, sometimes exchanged a few words about the weather."

"Have you any information that would lead you to believe that he had enemies or that there was someone with a motive for killing him?"

"None at all."

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"Thank you very much, Mrs. Rogan." He snapped the notebook shut. "If you think of anything later that may throw light on what happened, please get in touch with us."

"I certainly will."

"I guess I didn't need to tell you that." He blushed again, remembering who she was, and went on to ask her employer the same questions.

The interruption delayed her lunch break. In the lobby she encountered her husband who suggested that they eat together. Buying sandwiches and milk at a nearby delicatessen, they went to sit on a bench in a small park behind the building.

"Patrolman Walker says you were very helpful," he told her.

"That's generous of him, since I had nothing to tell. He was very efficient, very polite."

"I'm sure he was. Embarrassing for the boy, to find himself interviewing an officer's wife."

"I barely knew Henry Ross, but it was a shock to hear that he'd been killed. What happened?"

"The receptionist was the first one in this morning. She went into his office a little before nine and found him slumped over his desk. His skull was crushed and he probably died instantly. Doc sets the time of death as between one and five p.m. yesterday. His wallet, with all the cash gone, was on the floor beside him. Drawers were pulled out and papers scattered to make it look like a burglary. But we're not buying."

"Why not?"

"For one thing, it was unusual for him or anybody else in this building to work on Sunday. It's no place for an outsider to come looking for someone to rob. And if he was after petty cash or office machines, he wouldn't head for the only office that was occupied. For another, there's the nature of the wound. The victim was hit while he was sitting down and facing his attacker. If a stranger had come in, Ross would have been on his feet, trying to defend himself.

"The way I see it is, Ross was seated at his desk, talking to somebody he knew. The argument got hot and the other person grabbed the nearest weapon, which happened to be a heavy metal vase, and swung at him. All the signs point to its being unpremeditated. Then, when he saw that Ross was dead, the killer took the cash and set the scene. Before leaving, he wiped his prints off the vase and the wallet and whatever else he'd touched."

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"You say he. Does that mean it had to be a man?"

"Not at all. It was a surprise blow on a soft part of the skull and didn't require great strength. So far we've turned up four people with a motive. One of them is Mrs. Ross."

"What's she like?"

"About half his age. They were married six years ago, soon after his first wife died. The honeymoon is long over and he had a private detective digging for evidence that would let him get a divorce without paying her price."

"Where was she between one and five?"

"She says she was at home alone. In the evening she went to a party, got back late, and was still sleeping when Sergeant Pringle went out to break the news. Since they have separate rooms, that's the first she knew that he hadn't been home all night. Her story is that he left at about noon yesterday saying he had a rush job to finish. Shortly before he went out, according to her, he got a phone call. She doesn't know who it was, but Ross sounded very annoyed. He said he was on his way to the office and would be there all afternoon. His final words, quoted by her, were, 'If you come in, I'll talk to you, but if you expect to change my mind, you're wasting your time.' And then, so she says, he banged down the phone and stormed out."

"You sound skeptical," Sheila said.

"I'm always skeptical. Haven't you noticed?" He took a large bite of his sandwich, chewed and thought about it, then continued, "There are two possibilities. The lady is telling the truth and the person who made the call is probably the one who killed him. Or she's lying. She has her own car and could easily have followed him to the office and killed him. In case the imitation burglary failed to convince us, she invented the telephone conversation to point in another direction. Preferably toward Ross's son."

"Is he one of the four on your list?"

"A prime candidate. He's twenty-nine and plays drums with a rock group known as The Big Ripoff. The group lives in an abandoned warehouse near the docks. The other members say they were there together all day yesterday. But their word isn't worth much. According to the stepmother, Henry Junior has been trying to get his father to finance a demo—a demonstration record. The old man not only refused but threatened to cut off Junior's allowance if he didn't straighten out and get a job."

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"So he has a strong motive and a fragile alibi. What about the other two suspects?"

"They're both business associates," Pete answered. "The words Mrs. Ross claims she heard might have been spoken to either of them. One is an accountant named Walter King. He's been with the firm about ten years. A couple of weeks ago he made a mistake in setting up a tax shelter that cost the client a bundle. The client took his business away from Ross and Stephens, and Ross fired King on the spot. Even refused to give him a reference."

"He must have been a hard man to work for. Who's the final suspect?"

"His partner, James Stephens. He was the outside man. While Ross ran the office, Stephens worked the social scene, made contacts, brought in new clients. Lately they've had some bitter arguments about expanding the firm. Stephens wanted to open a suburban branch with his own son as manager. Ross was dead-set against it."

"Does either of them have an alibi for yesterday afternoon?"

"Stephens has a sort of one. He went to a brunch at his golf club, says he was there from one to three, got home at half-past three, then went with his wife to a cocktail party at five. Plenty of people saw him at both functions, but no one can swear to the time he arrived or left. He could easily have gone home from the club by way of Ross's office. As for King, his story is that he spent the day alone, watching football in his own apartment."

"Then all four have strong motives," Sheila summed up. "And none of them can be ruled out."

"Right. Henry Junior would be the easiest to pin it on. Some jurors might convict on his appearance alone." He gathered the debris from their lunch, started to carry it to the trash can but turned back before he reached it. "You sure it's all right to throw this away? You're not collecting empty milk cartons?"

He walked with her back to her building.

"This beats eating with sergeants," he told her. "But there's a drawback to having you work near the scene of the crime. People expect me to come up with inside information. Except as a sounding board, you've been no help at all."

"I'm sorry." She looked instinctively toward the urn. There was nothing in it but sand. Of course there wouldn't be, she realized. I already have today's wrapper. Then the incongruity struck her. The wrapper was always there at noon, never in the morning. Nobody

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eats chocolate bars at eight a.m. That wrapper must have been there since yesterday. Was a Chocko the last thing the dead man ate? She felt a sudden aversion to her collection, an urge to be rid of all the papers.

"Hey, don't look so upset." Pete called her back. "I was only kidding. I don't expect you to know anything about the murder."

"It's just—I was thinking—but that's not right—" Her mind raced ahead of her words. "Was Mr. Ross in the office last week?"

"Sure. As far as I know, it was business as usual."

"And the other man. Walter King. What was his last day at work?"

"A week ago Friday. That's when Ross told him to pack his gear and not come back."

"Then I may have some evidence. Come up to my office with me."

"Yeah?" He looked doubtful, but followed her on to the elevator. Two other people joined them, so they rode up in silence.

In her office she opened the bottom drawer of her desk, took out the Chocko wrapper, still nested in tissue, and held it out to him.

"That's your Saturday-night salvage." He regarded it with distaste. "How could it have anything to do with—"

"The one I picked up on Saturday is at home," she said. "I found this in the lobby when I came to work this morning."

"So?"

"The cleaning crews work every night except Sunday. That means this must have been dropped some time yesterday—the day of the murder."

"And you think either Ross or his killer brought it in?"

"Not Mr. Ross." She shook her head. "You see, when I started to plan on a T-shirt for Mike, I found a Chocko wrapper downstairs every noontime. Then suddenly, they stopped. And the last day Walter King worked here was the last day I found a wrapper. Until today. So you see—"

"Yes, I do see. Will you put that in an envelope? Good. Now seal it and write on the outside, 'Found in the Herrick Building lobby' with the time and date, and sign it." He waited while she followed instructions, then accepted the envelope and put it in an inside pocket. "It's flimsy evidence, but it's a starting point."

When he came home that night he was more enthusiastic.

"You did it," he told her. "They got two clear prints off the candy wrapper—King's thumb and middle finger. When we showed him what we had, he broke down and made a full statement. He had a

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chance for a job with another firm, but they wouldn't hire him without a reference. He came into the office yesterday and asked Ross just to tell the truth, that he had a good record for nearly ten years, with only one mistake. Ross was adamant, called him incompetent, unreliable, a brainless bungler. That's when, as King put it, something snapped in his head. The next thing he knew he was standing with the vase in his hand and Ross was dead. His attorney will probably enter a plea of temporary insanity, but that's the prosecutor's problem. You can take credit for bringing the investigation to a fast close."

"I'm glad," Sheila said, "that I was able to help."

"I only hope," he added, "that the D.A. can make his case without putting you on the stand to trace the history of the candy bar. I'd rather the world didn't know that I'm married to an amateur trash collector."

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

ALL'S ILL

by RILEY HUGHES

Her voice was shrill.
Her looks could kill.
He felt the chill.
He changed his will.

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Bobby could never remember Daddy's eyes seeming so big or so scary . . .

EVERY LITTER BIT HURTS

by MICHAEL AVALLONE

The Impala gleamed shiny and red on the sloping driveway. Bobby ran toward it, eyes twinkling, clapping his hands. He and Daddy were going for a ride! He paused, a bit puzzled, while his father lifted the hood and studied the engine carefully, peering at the electrical terminals of the starter to be sure no new wires had been added, wires which could connect to a dynamite bomb.

Jamison hadn't been that careful, and Jamison had been killed.

Bobby, of course, had no way of knowing the reason for his father's action, nor did the thought remain with him long. All he knew was that he and his father were going for a ride! And Daddy had strapped on his gun, even. Right under his coat in that dark leather holster.

The large man closed the hood, satisfied with his inspection, smiling at the boy.

"Remember," Daddy was saying, "don't ever throw anything out of the car. Understood? It's not nice. Especially when Daddy's driving fast on the highway. It just isn't *nice*, Bobby. You could hit another Daddy in the eye and cause an accident. *Do you understand?*"

Bobby nodded, tugging at the big Impala door.

"Good boy. I knew you'd understand once you knew the reason. Mommy will be proud of you when I tell her."

Bobby smiled. The words were running around in his head like happy puppies. *Mommy. Proud. Good boy.* When you are only five years of age, those words are glowing beacons of progress and love.

But above all, progress. The march forward, the long trip toward that mysterious land of Growing Up.

"Where are we going today, Daddy? Police station again?" When Daddy took his gun, it almost always meant the police station.

"Daddy's got to go to Elmira," Robert Black, Sr. said, a funny glint in his eye. "Part of the job, too. I have to go to the District Attorney

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to hand over some papers. You know. I told you. We'll meet Mommy there and then maybe we'll take in a movie. Would you like that?"

He paused, lighting a cigarette from the dashboard lighter. Bobby watched him, bursting with ride-fever and pride. He liked the sure look of the strong hands, the keen profile of his father. Sharp, like the face on a coin under a porkpie hat. Daddy had told him that once and he had remembered. What a funny name for a hat! Maybe Porky the Pig wore porkpie hats, too.

"Mommy's in town?" Bobby prodded with that unswerving curiosity of the young.

"That's right. Shopping. She took the bus. You were sleeping—"

"I miss Mommy."

"So do I. But we'll see her soon enough."

Daddy did some things with the dashboard and the wheel, and the car motor roared. Bobby liked that sound. It always meant going places and doing things. Though not very often with Daddy. Daddy was always away—packing bags, calling on the telephone from faraway places like Washington, D.C., and hardly ever having time to play games or go walking in the woods. Bobby wasn't too sure what Daddy did—he didn't go to work like the fathers of his friends, or leave the house in the morning and come back the same day for supper, or play catch—no, nothing like that.

Bobby only knew that the big man's work had something to do with the shiny badge he had seen pinned inside the black wallet that was sometimes left on the bureau in the bedroom. That and that scary gun he sometimes saw when Daddy was putting on his jacket. He remembered he had once tried to pick it up, and his father had been very cross with him for it. Bobby knew he'd never do *that* again!

Robert Black, Sr. patted his son affectionately on the cheek and released the emergency brake. Bobby knew what he was doing. The brake always made a funny sound when Daddy touched it with his hand.

"Now, Bobby—what is it you're going to remember?"

"Not to throw anything out of the car window."

"Right. So if we stop for candy or gum, you'll fold up the wrappers neatly and give them to me, and I'll put them in the ashtray. Okay?"

"Okay."

"You know last time when you tossed that paper bag out of the car window, it blew all the way back against the windshield of the car right behind us. The man couldn't see where he was going or

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what he was doing. He might have gotten hurt and you wouldn't want that, would you?"

"No, Daddy."

"Good boy. Well, we're off."

Daddy backed the Impala down the driveway. The line of trees looked so pretty in the sunlight. The big man turned the car around, heading it out toward the highway, his thick wrists relaxed, his large hands holding the wheel lightly. Bobby recognized the big school building with the American flag flying above it; next year he'd be going there like the rest of the kids.

He sank back happily against the soft seat and folded his arms. It was nice going someplace with Daddy for a change, instead of Mommy. Mommies were nice and fun, too, when they went to stores and places, but Daddies were better.

And Daddies never cried, while Mommies did. Like last night—

"Daddy, who was that man on the phone last night? The one who said something to make Mommy cry? Was it the man who got hit with the paper bag—did he want you to spank me?"

Robert Black, Sr. smiled, but it was a humorless smile, a grim smile.

"No, son. It was a bad man. It was a man who thought he could keep me from doing my job if he threatened—" Robert Black, Sr. suddenly closed his mouth. "It was just a bad man, son. Forget it."

"Why did Mommy cry?"

"I told you to forget it, Bobby. The man wasn't very nice. Like the big bad wolf in Red Riding Hood—"

"Or in the Three Little Pigs?"

"That's right. Don't worry. He won't call any more. Not after these papers are delivered in Elmira."

Robert Black, Sr.'s mind was on the road and the traffic; Robert Black, Jr. was thinking of all the things he could tell Mommy that happened that morning after she left. About the loose front tooth, the striped kitten he had found wandering in the back yard, that nest of chirping sparrows in the carport.

And the wonderful breakfast of French toast with syrup that Daddy had made. Daddies could cook good, too, just like Mommies.

"Daddy?"

"Yes, son?"

"What's F.B.I. mean?"

Robert Black, Sr. chuckled. "Who told you that?"

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"I was watching television with a couple of the other kids, and they said you were a F.B.I. man. Are you, Daddy?"

"Billy and Gary, I imagine. The neighborhood stool pigeons. What we need are about eight guys like them available to the Department. Well, they were telling you the truth, Bobby. I'm an F.B.I. man."

"What's that? Some kind of policeman?"

"That's right. It means the Federal Bureau of Investigation. That's my job. You knew I was some kind of a policeman, didn't you?"

"I guess so."

The Impala zipped ahead, going around a flying big blue car. Daddy drove like a race-car driver. Bobby beamed proudly.

"Is Mommy glad you're a F.B.I. man?"

Robert Black, Sr. shook his head, amused. "Sometimes I wonder, son."

"She gets—*afraid?* Like last night?"

"Sometimes. Women are like that, son. But it's a man's job, you know. And somebody has to do it."

Bobby nodded his head wisely.

"I wouldn't be afraid. I'm proud you're a F.B.I. man. Honest to Pete, I am."

"Thanks, Bobby."

Robert Black, Jr. glowed, glanced at his father, and was surprised to see the smile on the sharp features suddenly change to a frown. His mind searched for a reason for the obvious displeasure.

"What's the matter, Daddy? I didn't throw anything out of the window."

His father's attention returned to the highway, a smile on his lips despite himself. "No, but you did something almost as bad. You didn't fasten your seat belt. You always said you were big enough—"

"I *am* big enough!" Bobby's voice was stout.

He pulled the buckle from its place between his father and himself and then reached down between the seat and the door for the spring-retractable tongue that wound itself up into its holder when not in use, like that turtle Gary used to have, pulling its head in whenever you touched it.

His fingers found the end of the seat belt and he tugged. It seemed to be stuck. He tugged harder without success and then leaned over, peering into the dim recess between the seat and the door.

A strange egg-shaped object was lying there where nothing had been before, apparently pulled from beneath the seat by his efforts, and now firmly wedged.

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Bobby bent lower, working it loose, bringing it to his lap together with the end of the seat belt to which it was attached. He blinked at it, fascinated.

Robert Black, Sr., guiding the car along the highway at sixty miles an hour, wasn't looking anywhere but straight ahead. His profile was just like those policemen Bobby saw on television. Bobby sighed and returned his attention to the egg-shaped thing in his lap. He had never seen anything like it before.

It was made of metal and was heavy, and it had odd squarelike bumps all over it and a funny round pin in its top, held to the end of the seat belt by a thin strand of wire. He was sure Daddy would be interested, but first he had to obey his instructions. He tugged at the egg shape; it came away from the tongue of the seat belt, separating also from the little pin which now dangled comically. Bobby held the egg shape in his lap and latched the belt.

"Daddy—"

"Yes, son?" Robert Black, Sr. turned his head. And stared.

His face went white.

Bobby could never remember Daddy's eyes seeming so big or so *scary*. His face was all screwed up, like he had a toothache.

The roar of the car motor drowned out something that Daddy was yelling. There were so many other cars racing by, thundering, bulleting along the highway. Bobby whimpered in sudden fright.

His father's right arm shot out, flailing. Bobby recoiled, thinking for one awful second that Daddy was going to hit him.

He hugged the egg-shaped thing to his chest and shrank against the car door to make himself smaller.

Cars were hurtling forward, zooming ahead in a race for the sun and the horizon. A car horn blasted, frightening Bobby even more.

"Bobby!" Robert Black, Sr. screamed. "Throw that thing out of the car!"

The flying trees, the ribbon of road, the thundering motors, and four vital seconds had fled.

"Bobby!"

"But, Daddy," Robert Black, Jr. protested, his small face crumpled in confusion, "you said never to—"

"Q"

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a *NEW* detective story by

LIONEL BOOKER

Here is the second case in which the narrator and Lieutenant Shroeder of Homicide combine their talents, amateur and professional, to investigate—believe it or not—the wrong murder . . .

THE WRONG MURDER

by LIONEL BOOKER

"Right this way, Mr. Brent."

"Thank you."

Dr. Sloan led Vincent Brent down the short hospital corridor to the door of an office.

"Dr. Costain arrived late last night and hasn't had much sleep."

"I appreciate that. I just hope we're in time."

"He realizes the need for haste and wants to operate as soon as possible."

"Thank goodness."

Dr. Sloan opened the door and looked in.

"Mr. Brent is here to see you about his wife, sir."

Dr. Costain, a small elderly man with white hair, was slumped over some reports on his desk, apparently in deep concentration. Dr. Sloan walked across the room and put his hand on his shoulder, speaking tentatively.

"Doctor?"

For a few seconds Dr. Costain didn't move, then his head jerked up, his eyes still cloudy with sleep.

"Oh, excuse me. I must have dropped off. Come in, Mr. Brent, I was just going over your wife's records." Brent came over to the desk and sat down alongside as Dr. Costain turned to Dr. Sloan.

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"Doctor, would you get me today's report on Mrs. Brent? The head nurse has it."

Dr. Sloan nodded and went out the door without a word. As he closed it he could hear Dr. Costain's voice continue, "From what I can see, Mr. Brent, the operation is vital but I can't give you more than a fifty-percent chance of its success."

Dr. Sloan walked down the corridor, loosening his tie. Three more steps brought him to the corner of a busy metropolitan street where a smartly dressed young woman, Melinda Parks, was standing inside a glassless telephone booth, the receiver poised in her gloved hands. She nodded to Dr. Sloan who winked back and went past the street corner to a large electric coffee urn on a wooden table against the brick wall of the sound stage.

Behind him lights suddenly flashed brightly from above, bathing the telephone booth in mock sunshine. Distant traffic noises were heard, and Melinda, who had been rigid and silent, suddenly seemed to come alive and speak animatedly into the phone.

"Hello, Jeremy. This is Melinda. I'm in front of the hospital right now. I drove poor Vincent here so he could speak to the doctor about his husband—"

"*Cut!*" screamed a heavily filtered voice from the overhead loudspeaker. "What the hell did you say?"

Instantly the spacious sound stage echoed with laughter.

"His *wife!* His *wife!*" yelled Melinda, covering her eyes and blushing profusely.

"Give her a chance!" barked Dr. Costain from his desk, shaking with laughter. "I understand she wants to be an actress!"

"Is it too late to get Streisand?" moaned the young actor playing Jeremy who sat across the sound stage in a living-room set, holding a phone.

"All right!" said the loudspeaker. "Let's settle down. We've only got a short time before lunch and then we'll have to play the wife out of this show."

This brought new hilarity to the stage. I was over at the coffee table, scrounging around the pastry box which by now had been devastated by the cast and crew since we began rehearsal this morning. I didn't join in the banter because I was not a regular member of the cast of "A Way of Life," one of the most popular soap operas on daytime television, and the part I was playing, Dr. Sloan, was an under-five, which put me at the lowest end of the social order.

"Under-five" means precisely that. In the course of every daytime

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drama (as they like to be called) actors are hired to play roles which appear in only a few episodes, usually one. These include doctors, policemen, delivery boys, secretaries, passers-by, and the like, and if the dialogue is kept to five lines or less the pay scale is considerably lower than a more talkative part. That is why Dr. Sloan doesn't say anything when Dr. Costain asks him to get the day's reports. I had already used up my five lines ushering Brent into the office, and a "Yes, sir" would have forced the company to raise me to a higher salary.

For those few of you who don't watch soap operas I should explain that "A Way of Life" had become a way of life in itself. For eighteen years it filled living rooms and saloons with the troubles and triumphs of Vincent Brent, the kindly, benevolent mayor of Hillside, the fictional town where it all took place.

The show, however, had a distinction which separated it from most of the other daytime dramas which had proved as durable: it was one of the last that still refused to videotape its episodes and went on live every weekday afternoon at two o'clock.

"You can't create a feeling of immediacy with tape," said Lewis Galen, the show's producer, in a trade-magazine article. "People want to feel it's happening right in front of them."

Thus, working on "A Way of Life" could be a traumatic experience. Unlike a taped show everything had to be near-perfect before the lunch break at 12:30. Afterward there was only a half hour to correct problems, and it usually jangled the nerves of the most seasoned performer to know he was going to be seen by a good portion of the country with no chance of a "pick-up," which is a re-shooting of a small portion of a scene because of a line flub or a sticking door.

"I always feel like I'm going to lose my lunch," Jack Sobol, the show's writer-director, admitted in the same article. "That's when I sit with the top brass and decide if there should be any cuts or additions."

"Vincent Brent has been awfully good to me," stated Carleton Davis, the show's star who had accumulated a penthouse in Manhattan and an estate in Connecticut during the almost two decades he played the role, "and live or tape I'll always do my best for him."

"I'm a relative newcomer," June Hargrove told the reporter. She was Melinda Parks, a character responsible for recent plot complications. "But this role was a big break for me, and I just hope the show goes on forever."

We were doing the final dress rehearsal when June Hargrove

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made her flub. The rest of the sequence was a cut to the living room where the actor playing Jeremy was to finish his end of the phone conversation as the doorbell rang. He was then to hang up and open the door, admitting another character with whom he would do a scene until the cut to the middle commercial break took place. It was going well, and I was trying to keep out of the way of the three cameras and two boom microphones which had to race from set to set in the time allowed, something unnecessary in taped drama. If all three cameras are being used to televise one scene there has to be a moment when one of them can get away before the end to set up the next scene.

For instance, in the scene we had just done, Camera One showed Carleton Davis (Brent) and myself (Sloan) coming down the hospital corridor while Camera Two and Camera Three were focused on Costain's office. When we entered, these two cameras picked us all up, one showing actor Everette Thurston (Costain) at his desk while the other picked up Davis and me in the open doorway.

In the meantime Camera One in the corridor swung over and focused on June Hargrove (Melinda) in the phone booth. Then, when the office scene ended, the director switched to Camera One, already in place, while Camera Three rushed from the now dark office set to the living room set across the sound stage to be ready to show Jeremy on the other end of the phone. It was a highly complicated procedure but Sobol, the director, had been doing it for years and was a real pro.

At 12:30 his voice came from the loudspeaker connected with the control booth. "Okay. We're still over by four minutes but we'll give you the cuts when we come back from lunch."

Carleton Davis brushed by me to get into the elevator with Galen and Sobol without a word of acknowledgement. I had learned that many actors in soaps were the exact opposite of the characters they portrayed. Davis was a cold and unfeeling man who found it difficult to be concerned with anything other than the show itself, but when he assumed Brent's character he exhibited a warmth and humanity absent from his off-camera life. June Hargrove was hardly the flashy and sophisticated Melinda who had won the heart and adoration of Vincent Brent in the three months she had been in Hillside. Instead, she was a rather drab woman whose actor husband hadn't worked in over a year, and for whom Davis, in real life, had shown no affection at all.

As is my custom I skipped lunch and walked around midtown

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Manhattan, repeating my five lines over and over again. I returned at 1:30 to find the sound stage a bedlam of activity as Galen went from dressing room to dressing room with blue sheets of paper, the color indicating script changes, and Sobol conferred feverishly with his floor manager.

I was the last one in and out of makeup and came onto the stage only a few minutes before airtime. The pandemonium had increased because trouble had developed in one of the cameras and nobody seemed able to fix it. It was too late to have it replaced, so it was wheeled into a corner where a technician could work on it while the show made do with two cameras. Thurston was already in place, seated behind the desk in the gloom of the unlit office set, being the type of actor who likes to spend at least fifteen minutes in location absorbing atmosphere before he goes on.

I reached my mark in the corridor set to find Davis and the floor manager looking upset and discussing the missing camera.

"Get up to the desk as soon as you enter," the floor manager told me. "Sobol has only one camera in the office now and he wants you three to stay as close together as possible. Carleton will follow you."

I nodded, trying to act as if I was used to appearing before millions of people with new and unrehearsed directions, but my eyes unconsciously darted around to check the nearest exit. Sobol and Galen were nowhere in sight and I decided they were in the control room, waiting to give the starting cue over the floor manager's headset.

Suddenly the theme music was heard. Glancing up at one of the monitors I saw the program's title on the screen. We were beginning the show but as yet no lights, cameras, or sound had been turned on here on the stage.

First would come a short recording of the end of yesterday's show to remind the audience where the story had left off. It was Galen's only concession to tape and was followed by a commercial break of about two minutes. The actual live program would start after that, giving them ample time to remove the tape and rack up the machine with new commercials which would play during the middle of the telecast.

In the dimness I saw Davis fidget nervously and realized that, no matter how many times you have done it before, waiting to begin a live show was a harrowing experience. Fighting my own panic, I turned from him and glanced over at the telephone booth nearby where June was supposed to be. It was empty.

Before I could comment on this the floor manager barked a com-

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mand to get ready. The commercial was coming to an end. I spun back into place and saw that Davis' expression of agitation had been completely transformed without a hint of nervousness into the warm and friendly countenance of Vincent Brent. Thank God one of us was relaxed.

The floor manager, just a few feet away from us off-camera, now shot his arm into the air and lights brightened all around us. Since I had the first line I stared unblinkingly at that arm. When the commercial went to black on the monitor screen, he brought his arm down as if delivering a blow, and I immediately began walking with Davis, delivering my opening words in what sounded to me like a hopelessly quavering voice.

"Right this way, Mr. Brent."

"Thank you."

"Dr. Costain got in late last night and hasn't had anything to eat."

"I appreciate that. I just hope we have enough time."

"He realizes the need for haste and says he'll operate as soon as possible."

"Thank heaven."

I opened the door and looked in. Thurston was seated at the desk. So far I had only approximated the real lines, as had Davis, so I took special pains to get my last two letter-perfect as I crossed quickly to the desk.

"Mr. Brent is here to see you about his wife, sir."

As according to the script, Thurston didn't move. I turned to beckon Davis in and found him right behind me, as per the new instructions, but over his shoulder and through the office set doorway I could see Camera One start to rush away from us, its red light dark. For an instant I wondered why it wasn't merely pivoting over to the phone booth set and then I remembered that June wasn't there.

The three of us were now crowded around the desk with one camera getting the whole scene as I put my hand on Thurston's shoulder.

"Doctor?"

For a moment he didn't move and I was terrified he had really fallen asleep.

"Doctor Costain, can you hear me?" I ad-libbed.

He still didn't answer the cue, so I shook his shoulder gently and watched him fall forward onto the desk, a letter opener in the middle of his back. The red stain on his hospital coat held me fascinated until I felt Davis pressing against me. I looked up at him and saw

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none of the calm, good-natured traits of Brent in the almost horrified expression on his face. Neither of us was in character now.

Just as Davis opened his mouth to speak I heard myself say, "He's dead!" and then the lights went out around us.

Faintly came the sound of a doorbell, and then I recognized the voice of the actor playing Jeremy, going on with the scene after he hangs up on Melinda. Where was June Hargrove? It was only a fleeting question in the back of my mind because my main attention was on the lifeless, bloodstained body before me. Davis started to examine it when the floor manager rushed up to him and whispered frantically, "Keep going! We'll handle it! Go on with the show!"

He pushed Davis out of the set as if to propel him into his next scene as others bent over Thurston and confirmed the fact which I had already announced. The floor manager obviously recalled that I had nothing more in the show because he returned and rasped to me, "Go to your dressing room! Don't leave the building!"

I nodded dumbly and walked slowly off the stage, hearing him tell someone to call the police and beginning to feel the full impact of what had happened. Once in the dressing-room hallway I could hear the show progressing over the monitor as if nothing was wrong. When I passed June Hargrove's dressing room I saw that the door was ajar and the light on. She appeared to be oblivious of the filtered voices as she sat by her mirror in street clothes with her elbows propped up on her makeup table and her face buried in her hands.

Lieutenant Shroeder of the New York Homicide Department handled the investigation. I had met him once before during the Lila Montaine case and had been of some help to him in solving it. This, however, had not provoked any intimacy between us. At first he was surprised to see me mixed up in another murder and his suspicious expression gave me a vision of him going back to Lila's file to see if perhaps an error had been committed and I was actually the culprit.

He selected the producer's office for his interrogations and only allowed Galen to stand by during the questioning to give him background material on everyone. All the producer knew of me was that I was a day-player who had never worked on the show before. My main interest to Shroeder was that I had discovered the body, but this changed when I mentioned seeing June Hargrove in her dressing room afterward.

A puzzled expression clouded Galen's face. "I wonder why she was

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still here. We had cut her scene during lunch and I informed her of the fact as soon as we returned at one thirty."

"Why was her scene cut?" asked Shroeder, suddenly alert.

"To save time. The show was running too long and we felt we could cut the telephone call without hurting continuity."

Shroeder told one of his men to see if June was still in the studio and if she was, to bring her to him. He was about to dismiss me when I impulsively turned to Galen.

"Who suggested cutting her scene?"

At first Galen gave me the off-handed look which producers keep in reserve for actors who dare to enter the hallowed ground of production decisions, but good old Shroeder must have had a remembrance of my help in the previous case and told him to answer the question. I could have forgiven him anything after that.

"I don't remember," replied Galen testily. "Sobol, Davis, and I came to a mutual agreement that the scene should be cut. That's the way it usually happens."

June Hargrove was equally vague as to why she had remained. She confirmed Galen's telling her about the cut, but she decided to hang around for a while rather than go home. From her manner and tone I gathered that things at home were not anything to rush back to, but all Shroeder would consider was that this line of investigation was going nowhere, so he dismissed me as if I was to blame.

I got myself something to eat, returned to the outside of the studio building as night came on, and recognized the beat-up car still parked along the curb. I leaned against it and read a copy of *Variety* until Shroeder came out and scowled in my direction.

"How about a lift?" I asked innocently and got a rude reply; but after he got behind the wheel he unlocked the passenger side and I plopped down beside him.

Driving south, toward police headquarters and away from my place, he begrudgingly gave me the few facts he had managed to accumulate.

"Everybody there could have done it," he said and then sighed, "and nobody. What I mean is, anyone could have sunk a knife into Thurston's back before the show started providing he could be sure nobody was watching."

"Which isn't hard," I answered. "The lights weren't on in the office set and nobody notices anything but his own job during the preparation of a live telecast."

"But who would *want* to kill him? They all say Thurston was a

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stranger to them. He had just started to work there at the beginning of the week and none of the cast or crew had ever met him before."

"I could have told you that."

"You!" he groaned in exasperation. "All I got from you was a phony lead about a scene being cut! Where did that get me? So the Hargrove woman stayed around a while. That doesn't make her a murderer because she seems to be as unconnected with Thurston as all the others."

"It could be," I began slowly, choosing my words carefully because I knew what a violent temper he had, "that you're investigating the wrong murder."

He shot me such a quick glance that the car threatened to hit a well-dented taxi that looked as if it was only awaiting one more blow before expiring. I cautioned him about obeying traffic regulations like a good citizen and then explained how the show had been rehearsed before lunchtime, detailing the camera shifts.

"What is all this, Booker?" he finally demanded. "I haven't got time to take a course in television production."

"Look," I went on persistently. "Originally, with the telephone booth set still in the show, Camera One was supposed to flip easily from the corridor set to Hargrove as soon as Davis and I walked into the office set. When the scene with Thurston ended, Sobol had only to switch to the telephone-booth scene, already in place. Camera Three would then leave the office set and proceed to the living-room set.

"However, with the telephone booth scene cut, it was Camera One which had to make the journey to the living-room set, racing across the sound stage to make it before the office scene ended."

"So what?" he almost shouted.

"Isn't it obvious? Combine this with the facts that the tape machine was changing reels to set up new commercials and that one of the cameras had mysteriously broken down, and you'll see that for a brief time during the telecast the only scene able to be shot was the one where Davis and I found Thurston dead. Sobol had nowhere else to cut to. The fact that I was ad-libbing and Thurston had missed his cue should have alerted him that something was wrong, and ordinarily he would have switched to the phone booth, perhaps even before the letter opener was visible in Thurston's back.

"True, he could have gone to black, but it's a big decision to turn off all video and sound transmission, as anyone who has ever been involved in TV production can tell you, and first he would have

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checked for other options, letting vital seconds go by while Davis and I stood there looking down at a dead man along with much of America."

"What the devil are you getting at?"

"Why should anybody kill Thurston just before a live television show and arrange everything so it had to be discovered on camera? Why not kill him some place private, with less chance of being caught? Don't you see it yet? It wasn't Everette Thurston who was killed in the middle of a performance. It was Dr. Costain—the Dr. Costain *character*—who was killed in his own office."

This time he almost drove up on the sidewalk and into an OTB parlor. "You crazy—!" he began to sputter. "Are you telling me a character in a soap opera was killed for—for ratings?"

"No, but I wouldn't discount it." I went on quickly before another outburst. "You have to understand how real these shows are to a lot of people. Fans write in and give advice or make threats as if the characters are actual human beings. Now, you can make cast changes and come up with idiotic plotlines and coincidences, but when you kill off a person in the story on camera, before their very eyes, there's no way you can revive him by saying it was mistaken identity or a case of heartburn. Certainly not in this case. He was pronounced dead on the spot by a qualified doctor—me."

"Where does all this get us?"

"To a motive. Check to see who benefits if Costain is removed from the show. Your trouble is that you deal too much with the real world. You don't understand show business and when you get a case where you have to get involved with it, you're lost."

I took advantage of a red light to leave him, sensing the possibility of another murder. I figured I'd never again be allowed within six blocks of him and his car, but the next day he called me down to the station. He was more resigned to my theory now, having learned that one of the cameras had been deliberately tampered with. Also, his efforts to connect Thurston with the suspects was still going nowhere, but connecting Costain with the other characters was another matter.

"It seems Thurston was hired because they wanted to put an old character back into the show. Vincent Brent's wife."

"I wondered about all those references to her," I said.

"About a year ago the actress playing the part, Helen Sanderson, wanted out of her contract so she could accept a movie offer. They

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arranged to have her killed in a plane crash—the character, I mean, dammit!" He paused to get it straight in his own mind and stoically went on. "A few weeks ago Galen was contacted by the Sanderson woman who said her film career hadn't been successful and she wanted back into the show again. Galen hit on the idea that Brent's wife had not died in the crash but had recently been discovered on some remote island, suffering from head injuries that left her in a catatonic state, for God's sake!

"Anyway, to build up suspense they said she would die without a special operation which could only be performed by the top brain surgeon of the world, Costain. Without him, they kept stressing on show after show, there would be no hope of recovery and she would die. With Costain now gone, nobody can figure out how to bring Sanderson back on the show."

"Who benefits from that?"

He grinned and scratched his chin. "That's where it starts to pay off. Brent is supposed to be madly in love with Melinda Parks. If his wife comes back it will bust up the romance, and Hargrove is out of a job. Her husband hasn't worked in a long time and they're pretty strapped for money."

"Anybody else? How about Davis?"

"He had nothing against the Sanderson woman personally but was known to breathe a sigh of relief when she left. He never approved of the shrewish character they had written for her and said it hurt the ratings."

"If that's true, why would Galen want to bring her back?"

"The word is," Shroeder continued, unconsciously lowering his voice, "that Galen once had an affair with Sanderson but it cooled down. Now she needs a job and has been threatening to tell Galen's wife about their old relationship unless he helps her out."

"Then do you still believe what he said before? About not remembering who suggested that the phone-booth scene be cut out?"

He shrugged. "I don't see that it makes any difference. Everybody knew about it right after lunch, so the murderer could have taken advantage of a sudden opportunity. The letter opener was a prop lying on the desk all day. The cameras are kept in an isolated spot against the wall before they're used. The set was in semi-darkness when Thurston sat there, and he was known to come on stage early to try to get used to his surroundings. Everything just came into place, and it was probably an impulse to use a golden set of circumstances which would probably never happen again."

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I said nothing for quite a long time and Shroeder leaned back in his chair, concerned about my lack of enthusiasm for his findings.

"Well?" he finally asked. "What do you think?"

I told him.

The next afternoon the cast assembled in the reading room, along with Galen and Sobol, to look over the script for tomorrow's show. They all looked a bit haggard since I last saw them, trying to forget Thurston's death while having to mention Costain's in the new episode.

"You all remember Booker who played Dr. Sloan, Costain's assistant," Galen said to them, nodding in my direction. "In many ways it was fortunate we established such a character at that time because he can now be used to retrieve the damage done on camera."

The others looked at me puzzled and I proceeded to read the new opening scene for the next episode. It consisted of me, as Sloan, alone in Costain's office, speaking on the phone to Brent and assuring him I had studied for so many years under Dr. Costain that I was confident I could perform the same delicate operation Costain had been about to do on Brent's wife.

I glanced over at the faces which were now all turned in my direction and saw the same disturbed expressions which Galen had also worn when he received orders from the network to incorporate this new plot twist.

I told Shroeder not to worry about me that night as there was absolutely no danger to me then. I said I was also completely safe during the morning rehearsal and lunch, but that he should be most protective a few minutes before airtime. I even told him whom he should watch.

At 1:55 I strolled to the dark office set and placed myself behind the desk, making my presence obvious by a few words of greeting to the crew. The next minute they were so busy preparing for the opening that I seemed all but forgotten. I also made a few preparations and then felt the minutes tick by like centuries. Suppose I had been too smart? Suppose I had told Shroeder to watch the wrong person? Suppose that person, who had already proved most ingenious and resourceful, had outsmarted me?

I was interrupted by the crashing sound of a falling light which sent everybody running toward the other side of the sound stage. Suddenly I was deserted. Then I heard quick and muffled footsteps come around the office-set wall as a dark figure approached the desk.

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A hand thrust violently down toward the chair. For a moment I couldn't breathe or move as I listened to the steps retreating back behind the wall. Then there was a strange mixture of sounds. The show's theme music began and from behind the wall came shouts and cries of pain. The crew raced back to their positions as soon as the music began and the overhead lights flashed on, illuminating the office set at the same instant the red light of the focusing camera appeared. The show was starting.

There, quite visible to everyone on the sound stage and all the viewers at home, was the stuffed dummy I had placed behind the desk, grotesquely sprawled in the chair with a scissors protruding from where the heart would be located. Suddenly the office door burst open as a voice screamed from behind it, "Yes, I killed him! Just like Costain!"—and Carleton Davis came tumbling into the office struggling with Shroeder and two policemen.

His voice hit a strident pitch as he went on, "Now you'll never be able to save her! She's going to die! He's rid of her at last!" His wide eyes fell triumphantly on the figure in the chair and then he seemed to grow rigid with shock. For a moment he stopped struggling and looked dazed and stupid until he turned and saw me crouched behind the filing cabinet in the corner. I watched his twisted, tortured expression slowly transform into the benevolent and gentle smile of Vincent Brent, just as I had seen it happen in the hospital corridor at the start of that fateful show. He shook his head sadly.

"Poor Carleton," he murmured. "You've got him at last."

A commercial for jelly beans suddenly blared all around us.

"I told you you dealt too much with the real world," I reminded Shroeder complacently as we sat in Sardi's that night. He was fulfilling his promise of giving a starving actor a free meal in gratitude for helping him solve another case. "That's where you went wrong. When I showed that the Costain character was the real victim, you kept looking outside the make-believe world to find your killer and came up with the flimsiest collection of motives I ever heard. If Galen wanted to stop Helen Sanderson from re-entering his life he would have killed Helen Sanderson. Doing in an actor named Thurston was hardly going to solve his problem. The same is true of June Hargrove. There would be more safety and more sureness of success if she had taken the direct route of hitting Sanderson with a car some night on a deserted street. Besides, contrary to popular belief,

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very few actors would kill somebody just to hang on to a job. After all, we're not monsters."

He grunted, finding this to be the hardest of all my statements to accept.

"No," I went on. "Just as it was Costain who was killed and not Thurston, the act was committed to bring about the demise of Brent's wife, not Helen Sanderson. And the person who would most benefit from that was Brent himself. If his wife returned he'd have to give up Melinda Parks whom he loved more than anyone on earth. And remember what a shrew Brent's wife was supposed to be. Unfortunately for Costain, she was inaccessible, which meant that the only way to insure her death was to—"

"But you're talking about characters in a show!" Shroeder protested. "It's Davis we've got downtown—Davis making a full confession!"

"Are you sure about that?" I asked him. "After eighteen years of splitting his existence between two different realities, day in and day out, it's not easy to remember which is which. After only a year's run in a play I've seen actors unconsciously begin to take on in real life the physical gestures and speech patterns which they created for the role they're playing. And that's only for two hours a night. Imagine what happens when you spend a whole day as one person and go home as another for almost two decades.

"I'm not saying it happens to everyone, but Davis was deeply involved in that show, to the exclusion of everything else. Remember that magazine article where he said Brent had been good to him and he would always do his best for Brent? He meant that literally. They had become two separate but mutually dependent entities within the same body, and Brent's world was as real to Davis as yours is to you."

He appeared to think this over and I imagine he was recalling that eerie ride we took to the station after the attempt on my life. Carleton Davis sat in the back seat of the patrol car and kept looking down at his handcuffed hands with the same gentle and humane expression I associated with Vincent Brent. Even his voice came out as the character he had played for so long.

"I suppose this is all my fault," he told us. "Carleton could see how unhappy I was. I had told him so often of my love for Melinda and my dread at that awful woman's return during our many quiet conversations at night. The poor man only wanted to help me because he had always been grateful for what I had done for him. But

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I never thought he'd actually resort to murder. Not until I walked into that office with Dr. Sloan and we found Dr. Costain dead. I knew in an instant it had been Carleton and left him to work it out by himself."

And so he rambled on, in the character of Vincent Brent, as we drove through Manhattan. Shroeder chose to still think of him as Davis and took down his confession as such, but I doubt if Davis will ever come out of hiding. From now on he'll stay secreted in the back of the mind that now belongs fully and forever to Vincent Brent.

"There were a few things that should have tipped me off right from the beginning," I continued over the dessert. "After all, I saw Davis switch over to Brent's personality right before my eyes just before the show. I've seen other actors prepare themselves for a scene by assuming the character before they come on, but they always retain a touch of nervousness. The eyes that looked at me before we walked down that hospital corridor belonged to Brent who had no idea we were acting out a play or that Davis had murdered someone in the next set only minutes before.

"And yet you can't shut reality out completely. When actors flub lines it recalls something deep in their subconscious about their own existence. June Hargrove was worried about her husband being unemployed and her flub in rehearsal reflected that. I had missed lunch and was beginning to feel hungry, so I accidentally said that Costain hadn't eaten when I meant to say he hadn't slept. Davis' concerns slipped through into Brent who was supposed to say to me, 'I just hope we're in time,' meaning in time to save Brent's wife with the operation. What was actually said—by Davis through Brent—was 'I just hope we have enough time,' which would refer to the fact that we had to establish Costain's death pretty quickly or the cameras would be off us, thereby making it impossible to make it a part of the show.

"You know, when you come to think of it, everything pointed to Davis. He was the only one who could insure the announcement of Costain's death because he was in the shot with me. After all, he couldn't be certain I'd say, 'He's dead,' when I found the body, but he could make up for it by over-riding Brent's personality and prompting me with something like 'What's wrong with him, Doctor?' or by merely saying it himself. I'll bet that's what he was starting to do when I interrupted him and—"

I stopped abruptly when I looked across the table. Shroeder was gone.

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"A Way of Life" is no longer on the air, as you probably know. It was the first and only daytime drama that closed its run with the main character admitting to murder on camera and nobody could figure out a way to get around that.

It ruined my chance to play the running role of Dr. Sloan and I was never paid for the second show because I never appeared. I did bill the network for an increase in salary for the first show because my ad-libs lifted me from my "under-five" pay scale. So far they haven't replied, and I'm thinking seriously of taking it up with the union.

DETECTIVERSE

DEADLY PUT-ON

by SJAAN CLERC

He wears a top hat and a cape
And sports a silver pistol.
His diamond watch contains
A lethal dart beneath the crystal.
His red silk vest conceals a knife,
His ring's a poison pill.
Whatever the occasion,
He's surely dressed to kill!

© 1981 by Sjaan Clerc.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 583rd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . one more play—the big chance, the big score, the casino scam of the century . . .

We quote from the author's letter: "My interests include plays, politics, and poker . . . After thirty-five well-traveled years, I am, among other things, an ex-stevedore, ex-infantry officer, ex-director of forensics, ex-etcetera. The predominance of 'exes' is due in no small part to my current forced vacation at the Home for Wayward Kansans." . . .

SWANN'S SONG

by FRANK B. ROOME

I'm dying and I resent it. A gambler never likes being beaten by the house. There is time for one more play and I want to make the most of it.

The deck was shuffled for this one about three years ago. I was on the back side of a long losing streak in Las Vegas when I ran into Vogel. Vogel was a lush, a genius, and a Jugoslavian—I took his word for the last two. I still think he was a Waffen SS man who got left behind—he never missed a rerun of "The Desert Fox."

Vogel was an idea man and most of his ideas almost worked. We had run a couple of scams together in the past, but my bail bond usually ran more than any money we turned. This time he had a pip.

He'd found a soulmate across the hall in his $10-a-night hostelry, a hypnotist from the Belgrade School of Mesmerism with a taste for banana-flavored wine. Between renditions of Jugoslavian folk songs, Vogel and the hypnotist, a big bearded dude named Paskov with the face of a child, the body of a hippo, and the eye of a basset—the two of them became bosom booze buddies. Later we called him Pasha—Dr.

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Pasha when he insisted on the respect due his dime-store diploma and his "unique skill produced by years of private research." Right.

That night, well on their way to a magnificent stupor, Pasha and Vogel came up with a great 3:00 a.m. idea. Like most 3:00 a.m. Vegas ideas, it was going to make them a million bucks and break the casinos. They were going to hypnotize someone to throw dice exactly the same way each time he had them—exactly the same release, exactly the same aiming point on the table—the idea being that they could avoid the theoretical random distribution that guarantees the casino its edge.

I laughed when Vogel first told me, mumbling his way through a larger than usual hangover. It was good for a full five minutes of chuckles, but, when the chuckles dwindled, the damned scheme stuck with me like peanut butter. Why couldn't it work? Or be made to work?

That great creative team of Jack Daniels and John Swann put in a long night of planning and by morning I had found the way to make the big score that would turn it all around.

We needed two things, money and a respectable front, for it had already reached the stage that when I walked into a casino it looked like a security man's convention as they began wheeling out metal detectors and polygraphs. Fortunately, I knew where to find both things we needed in one package.

Will Yarborough had started out in the same Texas tank town as me and we'd both had the gambling itch from the beginning. When we hit the schoolyard blackjack games, milk sales fell forty percent. Then we took turns cleaning out the local poker sessions until they dried up.

Will won a little more than me, but if they cried he gave part of it back. I didn't. He cleaned me out playing heads-up stud once, but I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of letting him stake me. He was lucky and I wasn't, but he was honest and I was flexible, so it balanced out for quite a while.

We'd both headed for greener pastures as soon as we were each old enough to grow a good mustache. Over the years his lucky edge had worked the grind the way a half percent will if you play long enough. Will Yarborough was nationally known, respected for the "skill" that had made him prosperous and the "unimpeachable honesty" that made him welcome anywhere. Anyway, that's what the papers said when he won that annual tournament. Me? John Swann was a hustler in threadbare polyester with a fake gold chain and an

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overdue alimony tab who had to wear a wig to play $3/$5 lowball at the Mint.

Will felt sorry for me and I hated his guts for it. I'd been busted flat a dozen times, but had never gone to him for a dime. I wouldn't give him the sanctimonious satisfaction. That's how much I hated him. I took nothing from him, ever.

Until now. This was different. It was the big chance and besides, it wasn't like asking for a loan or a handout, I was offering him a share in a partnership—25% for providing the money and the front. It really wasn't going to be quite a four-way split—Vogel and Pasha were in for only ten percent each, but it was close enough.

I managed to get my battered car into gear for the trip as my worldly goods bounced around the trunk inside an old Samsonite two-suiter. Flush, I wasn't. Yarborough's ranch home was halfway to Tonopah. The house was the size of a Holiday Inn and God only knows how much land went with it. He acted glad to see me, played the gracious host like David Niven in some 50's movie. Bourbon in hand, I stuttered the proposition like some rookie hustler of hot watches and he bought it. He bought it! There was a sick feeling in the back of my mind that he would have bought cemetery plots in Zanzibar if he thought I needed to make the sale badly enough, but I brushed that aside.

He even put us all up. Of course there was more than enough room in the place. It was almost like some boxing training camp. Pasha held a daily morning hypnotic workout with Will, closed session naturally—he didn't want anyone to see his "secret" technique. Vogel recorded each throw of Will's afternoon practises on the regulation crap table in the rec room. I grew a beard, fretted, and took care of details. Critical details.

A week after I got back from a quick run to L.A. (just like the old joke, I left in a $2000 car and came back in a $100,000 bus), Will reported that a pattern had emerged. Another month passed before it solidified. Pasha discovered that the exercise had altered the muscle tone in Will's arm and he had to adjust for the new strength. They had selected a random point to throw from, dead center at one end, and a logical aiming point, dead center at the opposite end, four inches above the felt. He was coming on target more and more often. I mean, *right* on!

The key was, according to Pasha, that the throw was delivered the same way each time—the same numbers up on each die, the same release pattern, the same force. It didn't really matter which

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numbers came up as long as their pattern differed significantly from the normal theoretical distribution.

Two months and 300,000 throws later Will said there was no doubt, it worked. There was no movie win-every-time junk, but the figures showed that it did work. Betting the pass line and taking the odds, we had a 14.3 percent edge. There were a lot of variables: Will put different faces up on the dice, one just for the come out, and switched depending on the point if he didn't make the natural. We could have factored in field bets, hard ways, anything we wanted, but Will was known as a smart player and that kind of rookie action would have attracted too much of the wrong kind of attention.

The first Wednesday in October we made our move. Will called an old friend of his who had just opened a new casino called the Xanadu and asked if he'd like a little Yarborough action at the crap table. The friend was only too happy to oblige.

We had worked out our battle plan carefully. Will and I would be at the table—I couldn't pass up the chance to come in through the front door and rub their noses in it. Pasha would get quietly drunk after giving Will his morning reinforcement. Vogel would hide in our suite at the Xanadu and quiver.

Play began at 3:00 a.m. It wasn't sentiment for the anniversary hour, we wanted a dead time on an off day. Crowds of tourists and red-eyed desperate losers didn't suit our plans. If you've ever seen a crap table get hot, you know why. It's the closest thing on dry land to a school of sharks fighting over a ton of bloody steak. A low-pitched hum rises in intensity until there's a frenzied crowd screaming with each successful pass, and people fight for table space while management tries delicately to slow play. A crowd *does* slow action and we didn't want that. We also didn't want to pass the dice.

The magic of Will's name and the $100,000 credit line he had anywhere in town bought us our own table. Our audience consisted of the bosses of the eight largest casinos in Las Vegas. Yes, even they came when Will Yarborough called and promised something special.

He had told them that he had figured out a way to beat their brains out on the crap table. They had heard it 6000 times before from college kids with high IQ's and low common sense, boozed-up fast-food owners, and wild-eyed little ladies whose late husbands had sent word from the great beyond. But they hadn't heard it from Will Yarborough. They didn't really believe he could do it, but it

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would be something to tease him about for years to come and maybe, just maybe . . .

They had come laughing, smiling to each other with little shrugs that said it was a slow night anyway, so what the hell. Will let me, the poor relation, select the dice and blow on them for luck. An hour into Will's run and the big boys weren't laughing any more. A lot of puzzled stares zipped over the table as Will took a two-minute john break. Four hours and $72,000 later they were downright solemn.

The Xanadu's pit boss nervously cleared his throat and asked with a tight grin if we would mind a short break to check the dice and table. My throat got a lot dryer than his. Will just cocked one eyebrow slightly and turned to the Xanadu's top man, but there was no need for Will to say a word. The man was already chewing his pit boss's tail. "We don't run 'checks' on Mr. Yarborough's action here. Not ever!" Will nodded his appreciation and threw the dice.

Two hours more of the same steady grind brought us past the $100,000 mark and Will called his own halt to deliver the big proposition to the group. We should have hit the Xanadu a little harder first, but he was running the show, so I gave the dice a big farewell kiss and rolled them to the sullen pit boss. Natural!

Yarborough's pitch was short and sweet. "Gentlemen, I can continue to do this indefinitely. I'm sure the Xanadu doesn't desire any more proof, but I will be happy to give a similar demonstration at any of your casinos. Any takers?"

I've heard a lot less respectful silence at funerals. So Will continued, speaking gently to the assembled mourners. "All right, here are the facts. I can do this any place, any time. Others can be trained to do it. As you have probably noticed, there is no pattern to the betting or any other obvious sign to give away a player using this method. Playing for short periods, he would be invisible and very successful. There is nothing illegal about what these people would be doing.

"You will have three choices eventually. One, lose money—a *lot* of money. Two, try to bar every player who seems to win—at a time when you already have all the bad publicity and legal hassles you need with card counters at the blackjack tables. Three, close one of your key operations.

"We offer you a simple fourth choice. Each casino represented here pays $250,000 and I will guarantee that the system goes no further

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and that I will never use it again. You have my word on it, if I may be forgiven for stating the obvious. There is a fair sum at stake.

"Think it over. We will be staying here at the Xanadu through tomorrow night. After that we will be visiting any of you who decides not to pay. I'll play at your casino until I win $250,000 and you will still owe $250,000. And then I may open a school."

It was a hell of a sermon and it touched all the parishioners. They paid. All eight of them. That morning! Yarborough took his $500,000 and spread enough tips around to support Cambodia for a year. Needless to say, he told us to forget all the expenses. He said the look on the boys' faces when they each brought their little bundle around was what he'd been playing for anyway. I noticed that he did keep his half million though.

I was a little out of sorts when the payoff came. Returning from a quick visit in town, I found that Will had already paid off Vogel and Pasha. Gave each a full quarter share and waved goodbye as the two happy drunks started their trek to Jugoslavia! Hell, who could figure that all the casinos would fold their hands so damned quick.

There was no time to worry about it though, because the suite I'd shared with Vogel had to be packed up. Past bitter experience told me that the lush hadn't bothered to do even the most basic cleaning. Besides, a half million in your pocket soothes away a lot of irritation. And I had a little bonus to cash in when the time was right.

It took two bellboys to haul my trunks and suitcase out of the suite. The stuff filled the brand-new Caddy that was waiting downstairs. Yeah, my very first purchase had been the bright red bomb I'd always wanted. The dealer was still peeling stickers with one hand as he held out the other. It was a great feeling to light his greasy grin with fresh stacks of hundreds. I even told him to keep the change. Keep the change! How I loved it!

That was the start of two great years. Yeah, you can blow a half million in two years, or most of it anyway. I still got a half interest in a little bar in Sparks which doesn't make a dime according to my thieving partner and I own a cabin on Tahoe—well, eight miles away actually. In a good week I see $200 tops from the bar and to make it perfect, I find out my heart is going bad. More accurately, has gone bad.

It was time to get back into action, so I called Will to set up a rerun. Yarborough was still doing great. A sports mag had even done a cover story on him, that's how respectable he'd become. He

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still looked great, even sounded great. Naturally. He read my mind early on and said no way, that Pasha was dead. I said we didn't need Pasha. He said we probably did and it was no go anyway. I said I was going to send him something that would change his mind and hung up. It felt good to hang up on him.

It felt even better putting together the little present he was going to get in the mail. It had copies of everything—names, dates, detailed data on how a team led by the great Will Yarborough had pulled off the casino fraud of the century. Yes, fraud.

You see, I'd never believed in the stupid hypnosis stunt, not from the beginning. But Yarborough's name, that golden reputation that would keep anyone from looking too close, had given me a chance to re-work a scheme that had almost gotten Vogel and me buried in the Bahamas. Vogel had been quivering in our suite all right, but he had been quivering over the best electronic rig my car would buy at a little shop in L.A. that does not take credit cards. My part of the fraud was slipping in the dice with the hot spots that the machine made hop. The blow at the start and the kiss at the finish were all I needed to slip them in and take them out, and there was nobody better at that sort of thing. I had done it all through Yarborough's play. Me. I'd beaten the casinos for two million and pulled Mr. Will Yarborough down to the level of the rest of us hustlers.

For now, I planned to just use the threat of publicly tagging him as the head heavy of the scam to bring him into line for another run as the front man. I was going to tag him later anyway, but that was for him to sweat about. The breaking of his precious word would be enough for now. I added a last little note telling him that if he wasn't here, ready to play, in one week, the whistle would blow so loud they'd hear it back in Texas.

My answer came three days early and it ripped my guts out—123 words and I still remember every one of them.

"Sorry, John, it's still no go. I knew about your scam early on—I've got friends in L.A. too. And you're not nearly as good at the switch as you think. Not even as good as I am, because you didn't spot me pulling your dice and putting straight ones in the game. The dice you walked out with were just house dice—take a good look at them. Yours were flushed down the toilet. Don't you get it? *Dr. Paskov's system worked!* If you'd bothered to really listen, if you'd had a little faith, you could have been a big winner all by yourself. But Pasha, the one and only Dr. Paskov, died in Trieste, and my word is still good."

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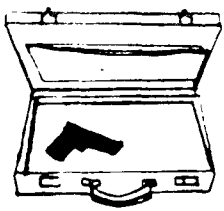
They found me on the floor with the note still in my hand and my arms and legs curled up like some cockroach hit by a Raid can. Now I'm in a charity ward with two winos and a burned-out punk hustler. Yarborough still ain't getting the satisfaction. He didn't even get mad, the rotten bum!

Somebody's got to find Vogel, we've got to tell him. Vogel, you luck, the system works! Pasha's crazy system works! Find us a graduate from the Belgrade School of Mesmerism and get back here. I want one more chance and I'm running out of time. Vogel, the scam was real. Do you hear me? It's no fraud—the damned thing works!



DETECTIVERSE

BAD BET

by ELEANOR SULLIVAN

A zealous detective named Child
With poker was always beguiled,
But he aimed far too high,
Both careers went awry,
Because his deduces were wild.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 584th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Alice once thought that Alfred had a cute way of speaking . . .

The author, Mary Sullivan, retired from a twenty-six-year career as an executive secretary on Long Island and moved, with her husband, to the west central coast of Florida four years ago. "I began to write two years ago, after a lifetime of saying I knew I could write if only I had the time. Now, at the age of sixty-three, my first story will be published . . . Hobbies? Playing the organ and playing bridge" . . .

THE STRAW THAT BROKE

by MARY SULLIVAN

Standing at the kitchen sink, Alice heard the garage door make its rumbling ascent. Without looking at the clock she knew it was six p.m. The clock in the dining room confirmed her thought as it began to strike the hour. The car door slammed, the garage door clanged down, the door connecting the garage and the kitchen opened, and Alfred came into the room.

"Good evening, Alice," he said as he turned to close the door behind him. There was no answer. He turned and frowned when he saw her still standing at the sink, her back to him.

"Alice?" he said. "Is anything wrong?"

She turned slowly, her eyes swollen and her face blotchy.

"Alice! What in heaven's name has happened?" He sounded more annoyed than concerned. Still she said nothing, and impatient now he said, "Come now, Alice, has the cat got your tongue?"

With an effort she said, in a voice harsh from crying, "Robert is gone."

Alfred looked at her for a few moments in contemplation. "So he

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decided to leave, did he? Well, he's made his bed, he'll have to lie in it." He was about to turn away when a slight movement from Alice stopped him and he looked at her in inquiry.

"Is that all you have to say when your only child leaves home because of your stubbornness?" Her eyes blazed from within swollen lids.

An impatient look came over his face and Alice knew he was thinking about the six o'clock news which he always watched as soon as he arrived home each night. With a sigh of resignation he took off his overcoat, and carefully folding it, draped it just as carefully over the back of a kitchen chair. Only then did he answer her.

"I don't see why you're making such a fuss over this, Alice. I offered the boy the chance of a lifetime. I had all arrangements made for him to start work tomorrow as a teller in the bank. He could have worked his way up to become president when I retire, with my expert guidance all along the way. Yes, it was the chance of a lifetime."

"What was the alternative?" Her voice had sharpened.

"I offered no alternative, Alice. When it was clear that he didn't want to fall in with my excellent plans for his future, I suggested that it might be best if he left us and struck out on his own."

"How could you treat your son like that? Our only child. How could you send him away from us?"

"I see no point in continuing this conversation, Alice," Alfred said severely. "I saw my duty and I did it. He'll soon learn that life is not a bed of roses, my dear. I'll give him six months and he'll be back, begging for the chance I offered him today."

"He'll never come back," Alice said, her voice bitter.

Alfred considered that briefly. "It will certainly have to be his decision. If he prefers to play the prodigal son, that's up to him, but I think he'll soon wake up to which side his bread is buttered on. He's been living on easy street all these years, now he's going out into the real world and he'll find a whole different ball game, believe you me." He then left the kitchen to catch as much of the news as was left.

Alice's first impulse was to forget about dinner to punish him, but she knew she'd be the loser in the end. She was in no condition to withstand the tirade that would be forthcoming. Wearily she went through the routine in the kitchen, hardly aware of what she was preparing.

When Alice sat down at the table opposite Alfred, it was as though

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nothing had changed in their lives. He filled his plate as he always did, his appetite not impaired in any way. Alice toyed with the small amount of food she had put on her plate, forcing a few mouthfuls down. Finally having to abandon the effort, she sat back and looked at this man to whom she had been married for over twenty-five years. How had she put up with him for so long?

Dressed in a dark, conservatively cut business suit, white shirt, and dark, solid-color tie, his graying hair carefully combed and anchored with hair dressing, he was still a handsome man. How lucky she would have been if he had been ugly instead of handsome; she would never have been attracted to him. During their brief courtship she had been dazzled by his good looks. He was always prompt, and his way of speaking was cute, she thought.

With a slight start she realized that Alfred had finished eating and was now free to talk. "Never speak with your mouth full" was one of his favorite sayings, especially during the years of Robert's growing up, and he always followed his own advice.

"I saw Bill Jennings today," he said, folding his napkin and placing it in its napkin ring. "How many times did I say that helping him was just throwing good money after bad?" He looked at Alice now, awaiting her comment.

"Many, many times, Alfred," she said, looking down at her cup.

"Yes, it has been many times, which just goes to prove that I was right. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear." He shook his head. "Bill declared bankruptcy today." His tone was scathing.

"But Alfred," she said, "you really can't blame his situation on him. Think of all the bad things that happened to him that were totally beyond his control."

"Alice"—his look was benevolent—"you're too soft-hearted. You believe there's good in everyone, but that isn't always true. You can't judge a book by its cover. Bill Jennings is the bad apple in the barrel, take my word for it."

Alfred left the table after putting his chair back in its proper place, leaving Alice to do the dishes while he read the paper. She knew he would be the first one to agree that a woman's work is never done.

As she washed the dishes her mind was in a turmoil. She had reached the end of her rope, she thought, and then shuddered. After all these years she sounded just like Alfred. Desperately she tried to think of an escape, but there was none. He controlled the money, doling out an allowance for household expenses and paying, only

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after careful perusal, the few charges she made for clothes and personal items. If she left him, where could she go? She had no money; she hadn't worked since they were married.

By the time she hung up the dish towel her thoughts had quieted down. It wasn't the first time she had felt like this and she'd managed to get through it. But this time was the worst. Robert was gone. She stood for a few minutes in the darkened kitchen willing herself not to cry, then walked into the living room.

Alfred had finished reading the paper which was reassembled and lying on a small table. He had adjusted his reclining chair so he could lean back a bit and put his feet up. He waited until Alice made herself comfortable on the sofa and could give him her full attention before he began to speak.

"This afternoon I had an interesting conversation with Miss Thurston."

"Miss Thurston? Your secretary?"

"Yes, the very same. She asked if I'd approve a loan for her. She wants to go to Hawaii on her vacation. Can you imagine? Wants to borrow money for a vacation." He shook his head in disbelief.

"What did you tell her, Alfred?" Why did she ask, she thought wearily, when she already knew.

"I explained to her how foolish it was to borrow money for anything, especially a vacation. 'A penny saved is a penny earned,' I told her. 'Why didn't you put money aside for this trip?' "

"But Alfred, surely I don't have to remind you of all the expenses she had with her mother's long illness before she died. How could she save anything?"

"Waste not, want not, Alice. She could have scrimped more on her wardrobe and she could have used public transportation instead of buying a car. All these things add up, Alice. I told her to forget about the trip to Hawaii. As president of the bank I couldn't possibly approve a loan for such a frivolous reason."

He selected an apple from the bowl on the table next to him and after inspecting it minutely for any bad spots, took a bite, not too small and not too large, a pleased look on his face as he leaned his head back and chewed each piece thoroughly. Alice looked fixedly at the blank TV screen across the room, moving her hands restlessly in her lap.

"Hasn't there ever been anything you've wanted that you couldn't have unless someone else helped you to get it?" The question shocked not only Alice as soon as she had blurted it out, but Alfred also. He

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sat up abruptly, moving the lever on his recliner to do so and looking at his wife as though she were a stranger.

"Neither a lender nor a borrower be, Alice. You know that's a favorite motto of mine." He was clearly affronted, but when Alice offered no rebuttal, he settled back as though smoothing ruffled feathers. "I've always prided myself on being a fair man, Alice. An honest day's pay for an honest day's work. I've never looked for a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, and I don't expect other people to do it either. It's true that when trouble comes it never rains but it pours, but I believe there's a silver lining in every cloud."

He got up and took his apple core out to the kitchen. The garbage disposal began to growl as the core was ground up and flushed away. Cleanliness is next to Godliness, he always said.

"I noticed a small tear in one of the kitchen curtains, Alice," he said as he rejoined her and seated himself. "A stitch in time, Alice. You should know that." She nodded, her teeth clenched behind her expressionless face. "Getting back to Miss Thurston, I sense that you feel I was too harsh, but sometimes we have to be cruel to be kind." He smiled gently, forgivingly.

"I just think that Miss Thurston needs this trip to Hawaii after the months of misery she went through with her mother," Alice said doggedly.

"That's almost exactly what Miss Thurston said to me, Alice." His face was thoughtful for a moment. "I told her that there comes a time when we have to face the music. I simply took the bull by the horns and put my cards on the table."

"What did she say?"

"Well, she didn't actually say very much. She looked at me for a moment or two, no doubt realizing that I was right, and then started to walk out of the office. I called to her, of course. I can't have insubordination in the ranks. She turned around then and said, 'Thanks for everything, Mr. Weldon.' You see, Alice, she knew I was right."

During the short silence that followed, Alfred steepled his fingers, and leaning elbows on the arms of his chair, placed his forefingers under his chin, a faint smile of self-approval turning up the corners of his thin mouth. Alice had drawn her upper arms and elbows against her ribs, her hands gripped tightly together as she looked at him.

"How long has Miss Thurston worked as your secretary?"

"Twenty years, Alice."

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"Don't you think, after twenty years of devoted service, you might be able to unbend enough to approve the loan for her?"

"Alice, Alice, one thing has nothing to do with the other. She was paid well for a job well done. I never asked her to do anything above or beyond the call of duty. I owe her nothing."

"What about me?"

"What about you? I don't understand what you mean."

"What do you owe me, Alfred, for twenty-five years of keeping house and cooking meals and doing laundry and raising a child? I've never been paid at all."

"Paid? Paid? Alice, you must be joking." He looked at her anxiously, but her face was stony. "You've always had a roof over your head and food to eat and clothes to wear. Haven't we always gone away for two-weeks' vacation each year?"

"To your parents' house."

"What difference does that make? It was a change of scene."

Alice surveyed his slightly flushed, indignant face and thought about all the vacations they had spent at his parents' home. Two weeks of taking down curtains and washing windows before putting up clean curtains. Waxing floors and cleaning out closets. All the things that "Mother" couldn't do because of her bad back. All the meals prepared by Alice "because she was such a good cook." Alfred and his father playing golf and fishing and then spending every evening regaling their wives with the events of their day, down to the smallest detail.

"Forget it, Alfred. I don't know why I mentioned it."

She leaned back and closed her eyes, her feeling of desolation overwhelming. After some minutes of silence she opened her eyes and looked at Alfred who was clearly puzzled. He was obviously trying to figure out a logical explanation for her unusual behavior. His face began to clear and assume his usual smug expression. With a sigh she turned her glance from him and stared up at the ceiling.

"Alice, I must confess that you had me quite upset there for a minute, but now I understand the reason for your outburst." She said nothing, her face blank as she returned his gaze. "I know my Alice," he said, shaking a waggish finger at her. "The salt of the earth, a pillar of strength. That's always the way I've thought of you. But we all reach a time when we need a little support." He smiled at her warmly and she felt a flicker of fear. "You're lonely, Alice. That's it, isn't it?"

"Lonely?" Her throat felt dry.

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"Yes, lonely. You're in this big house all day, all by yourself. You need companionship." The flicker of fear grew. "If you're not happy here all day by yourself, Alice, I have to do something to change the situation." She began to feel a little sick. "I'm going to put in for my retirement and then we can spend all our time together. Now that Robert isn't coming into the bank, there's no reason why I can't take an early retirement and spend the rest of my years here with you." He was beaming.

Alice's glassy gaze never left his face for long moments. Then, with great deliberation, she got out of her chair and walked over to the heavy brass lamp on the table next to him. Carefully she switched the light off, unplugged the cord from the wall, and before Alfred had time to comprehend her intentions, she brought it down on his head as hard as she could.

She set the lamp back on the table and wiped it off carefully with her apron which she had removed. The lamp was then plugged in and turned on. Only then did she turn to look at Alfred, crumpled in his chair, his precisely arranged haircomb ruined. His face was pale and still.

She bent down to feel for a heartbeat. There was none. She took his pulse for good measure. Nothing. She straightened up and looked down at him. He was dead, dead as a doornail, she thought with a little giggle.

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Jay Murphy's first story, "The Clay-McBride Feud," appeared in the 40th Anniversary Issue (February 25, 1981) of EQMM. It was a purely American-type regional story. Now, in her second story, Jay Murphy gives us another dialect tale, with the grim humor and deep pathos characteristic of this particular genre . . .

THE VARMINT KILLER

by JAY MURPHY

Well, son, being as how you're new in these parts, I'll explain how it all happened.

When Missy married Lucas she wasn't too young or too old, but then she never had been. Her real name wasn't Missy, either, it was Augusta, but even her daddy, who named her that, had to admit that it was too big of a name for someone who you forgot they were there most of the time. If you didn't look real close, you couldn't quite *see* Missy—she was just sort of medium, depending on how spiteful the describer was feeling at the time. She *did* have beautiful blue eyes, same color as those little flowers that bloom on the hill every spring, but nobody hardly ever noticed, because Missy was mostly too shy to ever look anybody straight in the face.

Maybe Lucas noticed her eyes, though; otherwise, Missy just wasn't the kind of woman anybody ever married. She wasn't even the kind of woman anybody'd ever bother to seduce. Missy was safe with every traveling salesman in the territory. Her daddy was proud of that for a while, then it started making him nervous, then it downright drove him to drink wondering what was wrong with the family genes. He'd drove Missy's mother to drink years before, so she didn't much care about the matter either way.

Anyhow, everybody naturally expected Missy to be an old maid, and turn into one of those sweet little old ladies that go around

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slobbering over every little child they see, never suspecting that most of those little children are the direct spawn of the devil himself.

Well, so we were all pretty surprised when she up and married Lucas. He was new around here, but we ain't as bad as some folks claim about accepting newcomers, as you oughta know, son; it's just that you got to occasional draw the line somewhere on what you'll accept, and a lot of folks thought Lucas was way over that line.

He wasn't a bad lookin' little fella, and I do mean little, 'cause he wasn't much bigger than Missy. He had a sort of mean look about him though, kind of like somebody had started feedin' him lemons in the cradle and he'd come to like the taste. I suppose Missy married him because nobody else ever asked her.

Oh, she loved him all right, she was downright devoted to him. Missy would never have thought that Lucas would have any other reason for proposin' besides love, her mind just didn't work that way. I guess he married her to get respectable or somethin', 'cause even if her mama and daddy did both die of the liver trouble, she was still what you might call one of the first ladies of these parts. When they got married, we were stuck with Lucas, like it or not, and it was mostly not.

That Lucas, he was a weird one. If you asked him what he did, he'd stand up as tall as he could and give you sort of a midget John Wayne look, and say, "I'm a varmint killer."

Actual, he worked down to the machine shop in town, but he didn't count that, being as how he only did it to pay for his guns and ammunition and all, and did you ever even know how much it costs to get some of those critters *stuffed*, after you've blown their lights out? Old Lucas, he had more heads and horns and hindquarters of animals hanging around his house than you can usual see running around alive in a zoo.

He was proudest of what he called his "varmints." Bobcats and bears, anything that he figured "endangered the human race," or so he said. Some people figured Lucas wasn't much of a human, but there was no question he was mighty big on the human race. He always said the varmints were the ones messing up the world, and he figured to wipe them out single-handed. I guess Missy thought those were real noble sentiments, but he'd a been more popular if he'd had a couple congressmen hangin' on his walls.

He had him a fine gun collection, for sure. Always addin' to it. Even those that didn't like him, which was mostly anybody that ever met him, they surely envied him that gun collection. He had

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him a couple shotguns that would make your mouth water. He took care of them, too, or I should say, Missy did. Another thing nobody could figure out was how she could stand to clean and polish all those guns. Maybe after a few years they got to be kind of in place of the children she never had.

She purely did love children. Babysit for anybody, for free, even if it did upset Lucas, who would have charged you cash for a bucket of water if you was on fire. She didn't give up hopin' for a long time; you could always see her knittin' a little something, pink, blue, or white, and old Lucas would be lecturing her on how this was no fit world to bring a child into, what with the varmints and all, and she'd better just forget the whole idea. He was carryin' on that way one day, and I heard Mrs. Jack Harris say, "Varmints, my foot. It's the money it costs to bring a child into this world that little toad-frog's worried about."

Mrs. Jack Harris has quite a reputation around here for being the outspoken type, you might say, but I expect you know that, son, being as I happened to overhear her offerin' you her opinion on the length of your hair the other day.

I pretty much figured she put her finger right on it about old Lucas, but Missy, she never would of believed it, and she just kept on knittin'. I guess she was hoping that some day he *would* wipe out all the varmints single-handed, and then he'd settle down to be somebody's daddy. Everybody else figured he was too pure-d selfish to ever want to hear the pitter-patter of anybody's little feet besides his own, but Missy, she never gave up hope "till she reached a certain age," as they say, and woke up one morning knowing there wasn't any point to hoping any more.

We didn't figure she spent much time cryin' about it or anything, she just one day took all those little knitted things and unraveled them, and then she made the prettiest hooked rug you ever did see. It was a sort of daisy pattern, all pink and blue and white. The ladies used to all the time drop over to her house to admire it, even if it did mean having to put up with Lucas sometimes, that's how pretty it was.

One of Lucas' more aggravatin' habits, and he had a bunch of 'em, was every time he'd come back from one of his hunting trips somebody'd finally break down and ask him how he did, and he'd put on this little superior smile and just say, "I got the varmint."

Never say what it was, until he had the corpse or whatever parts stuffed over to the next county and brought it back. Then he'd have

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a little gathering over at his house so's everybody could admire it. You were lucky if you got a glass of water at those little gatherings if you didn't admire loud enough. Me, I made some comment once about how the taxidermy fella had really caught the vicious expression on the face of a white-tail deer that was hardly grown, and Lucas didn't invite me back again for a year. No sense of humor on that man, nor much sense at all, now that I think on it.

Anyways, things all come to a head when Lucas said he got the black bear. First time he ever told anybody up front what the varmint *was*, but he was just so excited he was almost chasin' his tail, and he couldn't hold it in. Then when the ladies stopped in to visit Missy, they seen that her daisy rug was gone. When they asked her about it, she just smiled, and said as how Lucas had decided that his bearskin should be the only rug in the house, so's it would really look good, so she'd put her rug away. I overheard a couple of the ladies makin' a few comments on where Lucas' rug would have looked good that would have downright shocked me, if I hadn't got over bein' surprised at things a long time ago.

'Course, son, some of this I'm tellin' you is sort of second-hand, and nobody'll ever know the whole story for sure, but Sally Ann Dawson told me this next part. A real nice woman she is, with a whole mess of kids; I can't even keep track of how many altogether. Seems every time her husband would smile at her, Sally Ann would come up with another baby; and bein' married to a fine lady like her, that man smiles a lot.

Anyhow, she lived next door to Missy, and they just naturally spent a lot of time together, 'cause Missy was just crazy about bein' around all those little ones. She babysat for Sally Ann all the time, and helped her around the house, so as to be able to cuddle a few babies or whatnot. I guess Sally Ann was the only woman in town who was really close to Missy. All the ladies liked Missy, more or less, but she was such a quiet little thing that it seemed that nobody really exactly *knew* her, if you get my meaning.

Anyhow, Sally Ann always said that there was more to Missy than met the eye, and in the long run, seems she was right.

Anyways, she told me how that day Missy come over to her house and she was all "despondent." Sally Ann likes to use those kind of words, reads a lot you know, though I don't see how she manages it with all them little souvenirs of her husband's affection runnin' around the place.

So there was Missy, lookin' a little down in the mouth, and all on

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account of Lucas' fool bear rug. Seems he was all set to pick it up that day and invite all the neighbors in so's he could brag on them like usual, only they called him down to work at the last minute, them bein' shorthanded what with everybody down with the virus.

Well, Lucas was all burnt up 'cause he couldn't get down to pick up his corpsed bear that day, so he natural took it out on Missy. He did somethin' to her that shriveled her right up and turned her pale as a ghost. Some folks were a little scared of him, what with his reputation as a varmint killer and all, and maybe Missy was too. We never really knew.

Well, Missy, she was so drawn out and all, Sally Ann just naturally suggested that Missy take Sally Ann's old pickup down to the taxidermy fella and pick up the damn bearskin rug so's Lucas would turn back into his usual sunshiny self. Missy'd hardly ever drove in her life, but the thought of brightening up Lucas' day finally convinced her. So she taken off to the next county, and that's the last Sally Ann knew until she heard—well, I'm gettin' ahead of myself now.

The taxidermy fella, Jackson, he told us the next part. It must have taken Missy about an hour to get to his place, slow as she drove, so the time fits about right. Jackson never could remember actually seeing Missy in his shop, but he remembered the time his salesman buddy came in, and he kind of thought that someone else came in while he was telling his friend about the bearskin rug.

Seems that really was some *kind* of bear! A huge varmint, and in prime condition. The salesman had been admiring it, 'cause Jackson had it displayed right out front, to show people how good he was at skinnin' dead things, and the salesman asked who'd shot it. So Jackson starts tellin' about how some hunter over to Bay City had bagged it up north, but couldn't afford to have it done up into a rug when he found out how much it cost; so then Jackson goes on to tell him about this nutty fella that has a standin' order with him to make an offer to anyone with a good trophy that couldn't afford to have it turned into a memorial to his manhood.

The salesman thought that was so funny, Jackson went on to tell him that this fella never shot anything in his life, or ever went huntin' either. When he was supposed to be on huntin' trips he was actually foolin' around with the waitress at the café down the street. About then, Jackson said, just as he was tellin' the funniest part of the story, he remembered that a woman came up and asked him if he had any other black bear rugs waitin' to be picked up, and he

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told her he didn't, bein' as how black bears can be a little hard to come by in these parts. Jackson couldn't remember what the woman looked like, so it must have been Missy.

Nobody knows quite what happened next. Sally Ann didn't hear her truck come back, and she didn't hear Lucas come home from work. That's not surprisin', cause it's pretty hard to hear anything in Sally Ann's house, what with all the squallin' going on all the time. But she ain't deaf yet, 'cause she surely heard the shotgun. When the blastin' was over she ran to their house, and then she called me, bein' as how I'm the sheriff and all.

She'd taken the twelve-gauge away from Missy before I got there. She said Missy'd just been sittin' there in her rocking chair, cleanin' that shotgun like she always did, polishing it up real nice.

When I got there, Missy was still just rockin' back and forth, not lookin' at anything much. There wasn't much a body wanted to look at in there; Missy's daisy rug was back down on the floor, but Lucas had leaked so much blood on it that it wasn't very pretty any more. Lucas was just purely blowed to pieces. Even that taxidermy fella would have had a job tackin' him back together again. Sally Ann was outside bein' sick, and I felt like joinin' her, but I couldn't hardly embarrass myself in front of my deputy, even if he was outside bein' sick too.

Well, I felt real peculiar, telling Missy her rights, and then I asked her if she had any statement to make. I don't know why I said it; to tell the truth if she'd confessed anything I'd never have repeated it anyhow. I just couldn't think of anything else to say. There I was, with parts of old Lucas all over the place, and me tryin' to make conversation.

Anyways, she looked up, and looked me right in the face, and in all the years I knew her that's the first time I noticed them beautiful blue eyes of hers.

She smiled right at me, and she said, "I got the varmint."

That's the last thing she ever said, from that day to this, and they don't figure there's any hope; but that, son, is why I go down to that place every Sunday and visit Missy. She don't talk, but she smiles at me sometimes, and her eyes are still the same.

Come springtime, I take her a bunch of those little blue flowers that bloom on the hill.

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Take this as you will—gentle spoof or deadpan-serious . . .

THE MAN WITH IDEAS

by JOHN ABBOTT

B. J. was on the intercom, barking commands as if he were still leading a platoon on Iwo Jima.

"In the M.R., Trimble. On the double. Bring what you have on Cosmo Candy."

Alvin Trimble looked forlornly at his scratch pad. It showed one slogan which he knew had no pizazz, that did not, as B.J. was fond of saying, grab you. On Saturday and Sunday Alvin had stared at the candy, sniffed it, and eaten close to half a pound. He should have more material to offer than this—B.J. was sure to jump on him for such meager production. Well, perhaps Bolden had drawn a blank, too. Apart from a soft center that contrasted nicely with the hard outer shell, what was really different about this stuff?

In the meeting room B.J. and Bolden barely looked up as Alvin entered. Bolden was patiently holding a gold lighter to B.J.'s panetela like an acolyte serving at a ritual. The two men settled back to regard Alvin critically.

"Cosmo Candy," B.J. prodded.

"Yes." Alvin gulped as if a piece of the cloying chocolate were caught in his windpipe. "I thought some alliteration might be effective, since we already have a double 'c' in Cosmo Candy. How about 'Cosmo Candy, the chewy-center candy?' "

"No." B.J.'s headshake was emphatic. "It doesn't grab me. Anything else?"

When Alvin shook his head, B.J. surprised him by swiveling without comment, focusing on Bolden.

"All right, Lance. Give."

Bolden leaned forward eagerly, riveting B.J.'s attention.

" 'Cosmo Candy—we have a soft spot in our heart for you.' "

B.J. was beaming. "Excellent. A nice play on words. I like it—it grabs me. Another?"

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"Yes, sir. 'In the state of Tennessee, Cosmo Candy is the favorite Chattanooga Chew-Chew.' "

"Another bull's-eye," B.J. said heartily. "Run those ideas up to the art department, see what they can come up with."

"Will do, B.J." Bolden shot Alvin a pitying glance, then left.

"What an ad man," B.J. said enthusiastically. "Give him any product and in a matter of hours he's got a slogan to hype sales and solidify our account with the manufacturer."

Alvin remained silent, groaning inwardly. The morning was going badly, not the way he had planned it at all. B.J. seemed to have forgotten his promise of the previous Friday—to name a new vice president to cover Blum's retirement.

As if reading Alvin's thoughts, B.J. broke into his reverie. "About that promotion, Trimble. I'm filling the vacancy with Bolden. He has received a firm offer from Peebles and Ruff to join them in a similar position. I simply can't afford to lose him at this time."

"But he's our newest member," Alvin protested. "I've been here for over twenty years."

"Needn't remind me," B.J. said curtly. He was glancing furtively at his watch. "I'm mindful of all your faithful service. And you *have* had random brainstorms that resulted in nice gains for the company. But we can't exist on our scrapbooks, Trimble. It's today that counts, and today's ideas. Young blood, fresh new talent—these are the backbone of any progressive advertising agency. Sorry." He stared openly at his timepiece. "Got an appointment." He rose briskly. "Get cracking on that Cosmo Candy account. I'll be waiting to hear from you."

Alvin made a face at B.J.'s departing figure, lobbed an imaginary grenade at it. Rage was welling in him and he made no attempt to check it. He shook in righteous fury, his legs trembling. With an effort he gathered up his pad and pencil, stumbled to his office, collapsed in his chair, and buried his face in his hands.

Slowly the hot flush of anger began to ebb. He sank back against the cushion, feeling emotionally drained but surprisingly clear-headed. He was suddenly able to perceive the situation with a cool detachment that revealed his crisis in proper perspective.

B.J. was not the villain here. *Anyone* in B.J.'s position would probably have done the same thing—promote Bolden over him—if it were for the good of the company. Obviously it was Bolden who stood between Alvin and his well-deserved promotion. Bolden must be eliminated from the agency structure. Permanently. But how?

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It was not until late that evening, as he watched the rerun of a bank-heist movie on TV, that Alvin got his idea and developed his plan. He worked out the details slowly, double-checking each maneuver. Idly he wondered how Bolden, who was a dapper dresser, would look in prison gray. Alvin's soft mirthless chuckle caused Mei-Tei, his Persian, to change her position on the sofa so that she might keep him in view.

On Fridays, Lance Bolden forsook the steak-and-martini crowd that met for lunch at Rinaldo's. He'd found a small midtown restaurant that served a rich clam chowder, New England style. Alone, unhurried, he would savor two bowls; returning to the office he would invariably mention to someone this strict adherence to his religious upbringing.

It was vital that Alvin speak to Lance without being seen by any of their co-workers. Impatiently he waited four days, till Friday, going over in his mind the 21 key words he would use. He had developed them with care and he was proud that there was not one word in excess of his need.

Bolden had pushed aside his salad dish and was fumbling for a cigarette when Alvin approached his table, smiling apologetically.

"Trimble. I didn't know you lunched here."

"I don't," Alvin confessed. "But I was passing and caught a glimpse of you through the window. I have a slight problem that I thought you might give me a hand with."

Bolden smiled condescendingly. "Of course, old boy." He reached for his wallet. "How much?"

"Oh, no, no," Alvin protested. "It isn't that, thanks anyway." He held up his right hand, the fingers curled and stiffened. "Arthritis," he explained. "One of my really bad days."

Bolden clucked sympathetically.

"I've worked up part of an opening spiel for a new account at the agency, Liberty Finance. But I'm afraid that if I don't get it down on paper I might forget it by the time I can properly use a pen again." With his left hand Alvin wrestled a scratch pad from his jacket pocket. "Could I impose upon you to—?"

"But of course." Bolden withdrew his red ballpoint pen (B.J. had once said that the color red grabbed him). "Fire away, old boy."

Amazed at the calmness of his voice, Alvin spoke slowly, so that Bolden would make no mistake.

"Is your business sound?

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I mean, you pay off all big bills
Inside five minutes?
Wait! Put this alarm before the—"

Bolden stared at what he had written. He looked up, puzzled. "That's all?"

"Yes. And I do thank you." Alvin accepted the pad, awkwardly pocketed it. "Now I must dash to a meeting. Enjoy your meal."

Alvin had no meeting. He hurried to his apartment, to his work desk where scissors, glue, and envelope were waiting. Cutting carefully, he separated each word Bolden had written from its neighbors. On another sheet from the same scratch pad he arranged them to form a different message. Then he glued the words lightly on the sheet. He examined his work and decided that it did look like one of those patchwork demand notes he'd seen on that TV movie.

He fanned the sheet gently to speed drying. A Xerox copy would remove all signs of the glue. When the final copy was ready and in the envelope he would need only another Friday to complete his plan. Alvin wondered how he could ever wait.

A week later Alvin caught Bolden alone in his office. Alvin watched as Bolden slipped into a raincoat, then checked the sky for wetness.

"Out for chowder?" Alvin asked amiably.

Bolden grunted. "Nothing stops me. You should know that."

Alvin nodded admiringly. "Afraid I got caught without my rain gear today. Say, you will be passing my bank on your way. I do want to deposit this check so I'll be able to draw on it over the weekend. Could you—?"

Bolden sighed, reached for the envelope. The old buzzard was getting to be something of a drag. "Glad to."

Alvin smiled his thanks. "Don't get wet."

Two hours later a dripping police lieutenant was in Alvin's office, having brushed by the anteroom secretary. The ID he flashed at Alvin showed a much younger man; Alvin caught the name Decker.

"We've arrested one of your co-workers for attempted bank robbery—a Mr. Bolden?"

Alvin gasped. "I can't believe it."

"You will, in time," Decker assured him. "He handed the teller a note demanding money and she toed a silent alarm. We nabbed him right at the counter. He had no weapon—was faking there—but they often do."

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"Perhaps," Alvin suggested, "the note was ambiguous and the teller made the wrong interpretation?"

"Are you kidding?" Decker reached inside his raincoat. "This is a verifax of what he wrote. Listen:

This is the payoff.

Put all your big bills inside.

Wait five minutes before you sound alarm.

I mean business."

"Not much chance of a double meaning there," Alvin said. "But what does Bolden say about it?"

"Well, that's why I'm here, Mr. Trimble. He's been screaming that he was duped into the whole thing, that it is all, really, your doing."

"Good grief. Do you mean he's suggesting that we are partners in this awful business?"

Decker grinned. "No, nothing like that. Oh, he sounds pretty paranoid, I must admit. He claims you got him to write some innocent message, then rearranged the words to become a threatening demand."

"Why, that's crazy," Alvin protested. "Crazy. But then—oh, my, do you think he could be setting up a plea of temporary insanity?"

"Could be," Decker admitted. "Say, do you have arthritis?"

"No, I don't. What a strange question. I'm healthy as a rock. Our company doctor can verify that—we get a free physical every year as part of our fringe benefits program."

"I'll have to check it out, of course. Just routine. But these criminals are all alike: once they've been caught they try desperately to wriggle free and they come up with some of the wildest cop-outs you can imagine."

Alvin shrugged. "I guess so. In my line of work I've had little contact with such people. I'm afraid all I know about such things as bank robberies is what I see on television."

On Monday Alvin moved into the vice-president's office. B.J. dropped by with congratulations and a hearty backslap.

"I'm going to begin grooming you to fill my shoes when I retire," he promised.

Alvin smiled. You'd better hurry, he thought. I'm beginning to get another idea.

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a ***NEW*** detective story by

SHIZUKO NATSUKI

Many detective-story critics in Japan have called Shizuko Natsuki "the Agatha Christie of the Orient." Here is her second story to be translated into English, and when you have finished reading it, ask yourself: How many non-Japanese mystery writers would have dared to use this plot?

THE SOLE OF THE FOOT

by SHIZUKO NATSUKI

Toho City has a population of approximately 35,000 and is situated only about one hour from Tokyo by train. It is a quiet town, surrounded on three sides by mountains, and its main claim to fame is the Rinko Temple which was built there some four hundred years ago.

Since the town was connected with Tokyo by a private railway line and a national highway, the number of pilgrims visiting the temple has increased tremendously each year; most of them go on to spend the night at a nearby hot-spring resort area.

The temple itself consists of several large wooden buildings set among the trees on a heavily wooded mountainside. Here and there the white concrete walls of new buildings can be seen contrasting sharply with the mellow wood of the original structures.

The main hall of the temple is dedicated to the Buddhist god of success while the secondary shrine is dedicated to Daikoku, the Shinto God of wealth. The presence of these two gods is obviously the reason for the temple's huge popularity, and in these days of inflation the temple is always crowded with merchants and office workers who come to pray for prosperity.

The temple is especially crowded on New Year's Day when people

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come from far and wide to partake in the famous ceremony at the Daikoku shrine. A similar ceremony is conducted at many Shinto shrines, but the one at Toho City is by far the most famous. The pilgrims give a small amount of loose change to the priests who wash the coins in the temple's stream and return them to the donors. It is said that if a man keeps money blessed in this way for the remainder of the year, the god of wealth will smile on him.

After the ceremony the pilgrims move on to the main temple to make an offering to the Buddha of success before setting off home, and so popular is the event that on the first and second of January the main street of the town is overflowing with cars and gaily clad people on their way to and from the temple. There is another flurry of excitement on the second and third of May when the spring festival takes place, but for the remainder of the year the town is a quiet, peaceful place far removed from the bustle of city life.

Friday the eighth of December had been a cold day with heavy snow clouds filling the sky. Although it didn't usually snow in this area, this day was bitter cold and a few lonely snowflakes drifted down from the mountain's peak behind the temple.

It was the first really cold day that winter and because of the inclement weather there was hardly anyone in the main street that afternoon when three men robbed the local bank.

The bank was an unprepossessing concrete building set in the middle of the main street, looking more like a post office than a bank. Although the shutter over the main entrance was closed at three o'clock, the employees' entrance, which opened onto a side street, was left open to cater to anyone who hadn't been able to visit the bank by the official closing time.

At 4:15 that afternoon one of the clerks noticed a youngish man look in from the side door, but he soon disappeared and the clerk didn't give him a second thought, believing the man was one of their regular customers who had forgotten something and would soon be back.

There were seven people employed in the bank, two girls and five men, but two of the men were out on business and wouldn't be back until about six o'clock when the building would be locked up for the night. All the employees had alarm switches under their desks which connected directly with the police station; but there were no customers in the bank and they were quite unprepared when three men in black ski masks burst in through the side door.

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The first man rushed up to the nearest clerk and covered him with a shotgun, while the second seized one of the women clerks and held a hunting knife to her throat. It was all over in a few moments and no one had a chance to react.

"One move from any of you and I'll blow this man's head off!"

The robber with the gun had a deep voice, but it was muffled by his ski mask.

"If anyone calls the police you're all dead!"

Apart from the girl who was being held by the knifeman, they all had risen to their feet involuntarily, but seeing that the intruders weren't bluffing, no one made an effort to press the alarm.

The man with the gun nodded to the third member of the gang, a big man who had been standing unarmed by the counter. Seeing the signal, the third man put his gloved hand into the pocket of his jacket and produced a small bottle and a handkerchief which he folded into quarters. He pushed his way behind the counter and going up to one of the clerks, told him to put his hands behind his back. As soon as the bank employee complied, the robber opened the bottle and everyone in the building could tell from the pungent smell that it contained ether.

Pouring some of the liquid onto the handkerchief, he put the bottle down on the desk, and standing behind the clerk, clamped the material against the man's mouth and nose. The clerk struggled briefly, but the big masked man held him firmly and in less than a minute the clerk slumped to the floor unconscious. The robber then moved on to drug the girl who was sitting at the next desk.

The remaining gang members continued to guard their hostages and in less than five minutes only the three robbers and the manager were left conscious. The man with the gun, who seemed to be the leader, walked over to the manager and prodded him in the chest with the gun.

"Where's the money?" he demanded.

The manager saw that any resistance would be futile and gestured sullenly toward the safe behind him. The main door of the vault was open, and all that stood between the holdup men and the money was a light mesh door. The gunman ordered the manager to open this and the manager, drawing a large bunch of keys from his desk, did as he was told.

The safe contained about twenty million yen in cash, approximately one hundred thousand dollars, and after gazing at it rap-

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turously for a few moments, the leader nodded toward the big man who lost no time in administering the drug to the manager.

The three men then stuffed all the money into a large knapsack that the knifeman had been carrying, and slipped out through the side door to a small gray car they had left outside. The whole robbery had taken less than ten minutes and the robbers had disappeared in the direction of the temple long before anyone knew that anything unusual had happened at the bank.

It was 5:20 before the police were informed of the robbery. The girl who had been threatened with the knife was the first to regain consciousness and as soon as she had her wits she pressed the alarm.

The men from Toho police station soon arrived on the scene, and once they learned what had happened, they set up roadblocks on all the roads out of town and arranged for checks at the bus and railway stations. This having been done, they started their inquiries in and around the bank. The other bank employees regained consciousness, and after a brief checkup at the local hospital, were declared to be unharmed and fit to help the police investigation.

No clues were found in the bank: the robbers hadn't left anything behind and having worn gloves the whole time, they didn't leave any fingerprints. The only possible clue was a number of large footprints in front of the teller's counter which were thought to have been made by the robbers' rubber boots; but no one could be sure the prints belonged to the thieves, and besides, they weren't very clear. The police weren't sure they would even be able to trace the manufacturer.

The interrogations of the clerks didn't help much either. None of them had seen the robbers' faces except for the moment when the first man had looked in through the side door; but he had only stuck his head in briefly—too short a time for the clerk to see him clearly. Both the man with the gun and the man who had administered the ether had been above average height, especially the latter of the two, and the clerks all guessed that he must have been at least six feet tall. The man with the knife didn't have any particular distinguishing features, being of average height, and like the others clothed in dark-brown baggy clothes.

The big man with the drug had come the closest to the clerks and two of them had been able to state that he had a gold tooth; but despite the fact that he and the gunman had spoken, their voices

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had been muffled by their masks and no accurate description of their voices was possible.

With only this to go on, the police realized they would have to be lucky if they were to capture the gang, and although someone reported seeing a small dirty-gray car parked outside the side entrance of the bank, the person had not made note of the car's license number. Even if he had, the police doubted that it would help much; a gang that had planned everything else in such careful detail would not be likely to have forgotten to change the license plates on their escape vehicle.

Lieutenant Sato of the Toho City police force and Lieutenant Kaizuka from the Prefectural Headquarters were in charge of the inquiries at the bank, and after they had searched the place thoroughly and questioned the witnesses, they made their way back to headquarters to discuss the case with their colleagues. They were still a bit early for the meeting, so they decided to go up to the canteen and have a cup of tea while they waited.

"We were called in too late. The alarm didn't go off until five twenty which means they'd already been gone an hour before we knew what had happened and could set up the roadblocks."

Kaizuka looked a bit vexed when he said this.

"Yes," Sato said irritably, "and what's more, the men on the roadblocks didn't even know what color car they were supposed to be looking for! Anyway, with an hour's lead I doubt that they'd be anywhere in the area. It's a classic case of locking the barn door after the horse has been stolen."

"Yes, the whole thing was executed beautifully from the beginning. Whoever planned the job must have been quite familiar with the bank to have timed it for four fifteen, because while the side door would still be open, it was very unlikely there would be any customers an hour after the bank had closed. On top of this, they still had an hour and a half before the rest of the bank staff returned, and so they kept the number of people they would have to deal with at an absolute minimum. Also, on that particular day the bank had been asked to hold eighteen million yen in readiness for the local businesses' and shops' payday and therefore had twenty million on hand in its vault."

"Yes, they certainly planned it well, but we've still got one lead."

"You mean the serial numbers on the notes?" asked Kaizuka, nodding.

They had learned from the manager that while ten million yen

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had been in untraceable used notes, the remaining ten million yen had been in new notes, and there was a record of the serial numbers.

When all the others got back to the station, they discussed the case and decided on the following courses of action:

1) Try to find witnesses and discover what happened to the gray car.
2) Investigate everyone who purchased ether recently.
3) Check up on all the employees of the bank and anyone else who might be familiar with the inner workings of the bank.
4) Investigate everyone in the prefecture who had a shotgun license.
5) Announce in the papers that all the stolen money was untraceable, then have all the financial institutions in the area keep a check on the serial numbers.

Sato wasn't very optimistic—he felt there were too few clues. They had no way of tracing the car and anyone could easily have bought the ether at a pharmacist's long ago. There were at least fifteen thousand people in the prefecture with shotgun licenses and no doubt many more who owned guns illegally. The only possible chance Sato could see was to trace the robbers through the serial numbers on the notes.

That year the weather during the New Year's holiday was exceptionally good and Rinko Temple had a record number of visitors.

Two hours before the bell that rang in the new year had finished tolling, there was already a long line of people waiting by the small river for the money-washing ceremony. As the day wore on, the road from the temple down to the main street of the town was jammed with cars, mostly from Tokyo, and the sidewalks were crowded with family groups and people wearing kimonos.

The bank was closed, and with its shutters down it looked like any other building, but some of the passers-by had obviously read about the robbery and could be seen standing outside looking at it.

According to a police estimate that was published on January fourth, there was a record 1,700,000 visitors to the temple during the three-day holiday. The local newspaper also went on to estimate that there was probably more than one hundred million yen given in offerings.

Considering that most of it was given in loose change, this was a huge amount, and every year the offerings were counted by the temple's staff in a basement room under the main building. The workers, all wearing white-paper masks over their mouths and

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noses, would count all the notes by hand while the coins were separated by a machine hidden in the bottom of the offertory box and arrived in the basement sorted into their different values. The head priests checked the money in person, and when the totals were known, they were recorded in the temple's ledgers as the temple's chief source of income. After the holidays the local bank sent an armored car to the temple, and after rechecking the money in front of the temple staff, the messengers took the money away to be deposited. Temples in Japan represent a great deal of business to the banks, so Rinko and the other main temples all receive special treatment from the financial institutions.

About ten days later, after the festivities were finished and the town had sunk back into its usual peaceful routine, the police received a telephone call from a local bar at a little after eleven in the evening. Apparently a 10,000-yen note whose serial number corresponded with that of one of the stolen ones had turned up. This was the first lead they had received and as soon as he heard about it from the officer who took the call, Sato hurried out to verify the report.

The call had come from a bar called Fuji which was in a small building just off the main street about a mile from the bank. It had been built about ten years before and was already beginning to show signs of age. It had a counter and three tables with an old-fashioned jukebox set against the back wall. It did a brisk business at the New Year when the town was filled with tourists, but usually it was only frequented by a few of the town's younger citizens.

Although the serial numbers hadn't been published in the papers, as time passed the police decided not to rely only on the banks, but also to get in touch with the bars, supermarkets, and other places that dealt daily with money.

The Fuji landlord, Chino, was standing behind the counter, a garish cravat in his collar which clashed with his shirt. He had the 10,000-yen note laid out in front of him and looked very pleased with himself.

"I've been very careful to check all the ten thousands I've taken in ever since the police told me about them."

Sato took out his notebook and checked the number against his list. There was no mistake—it was one of the stolen notes.

"I generally look after the till myself in the evenings," Chino continued. "So when Mr. Suzuki gave me this note I automatically checked the number and saw it was one of the ones on the list!"

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"What? You know the name of the man who gave you this?"

"Yes, he's one of my regular customers, that's why I was so surprised. But anyway, as I was saying, when he gave it to me there were still some other customers on the premises, so I waited until I closed up for the night before I called you."

Suzuki was a man of about fifty who lived near the bar. He came in alone four times a month and after having two or three whiskies, he would pay in cash and go home. This routine had been going on for years, so the landlord had got to know him by name.

"He's not much of a talker, but I think he said that he worked at the temple."

Apart from the office workers who commuted to Tokyo every day, many of the residents of Toho City worked for the temple in one way or another.

Investigation revealed that the note passer's full name was Toshiro Suzuki; he was fifty-one years old, and although he had been working at the temple as a clerk for twenty years and was now head of the general affairs section, he was not a priest. He lived in a small bungalow a few hundred meters from the Fuji bar with his wife Miyako, forty-seven, and his son Shigeru who was thirteen and attended the local junior high. The house was small, but Suzuki had had it built to order a short time before on some land his wife had been given by her family who were local farmers.

The police learned that Suzuki was a serious and methodical worker, but was also quiet and introverted and wasn't good at making friends.

Forty-one people were employed full-time at the temple. Nineteen were priests, twenty were laymen, and an old couple acted as caretakers. Apart from the bishop and two young novices, the monks had charge of the various buildings and helped with the business side of the temple. The laymen were all under the deacon, and although Suzuki was chief of the general affairs section, he wasn't particularly intelligent and didn't stand out among his colleagues.

The police also investigated Suzuki's financial position. Although he had recently had a new house built, he still had a tidy sum in the bank; also, his wife had some money of her own and they had only one child. None of this was particularly unusual. In fact, compared to the priests of the temple who all lived in luxurious homes and drove to the temple in expensive limousines, Suzuki's lifestyle was very modest.

He left his house at 7:45 every morning and walked down the

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main street for five minutes to the temple. In the summer he would return home at 5:30 and in the winter at 4:30. He didn't seem to have any hobbies, although he did occasionally go fishing when the weather was fine; he certainly didn't have a shotgun or driver's license. His chief enjoyment seemed to be his weekly visit to Fuji or another bar that he frequented.

His schedule had been the same for years and as far as the police could tell, it hadn't changed in the slightest respect since the bank robbery on December eighth.

At headquarters the detectives were looking at the dossier they had prepared on Suzuki. He was five feet five inches tall, of average build, had a long face, and was rather swarthy in complexion.

"Well, going by his build, we can rule him out as being the man with the gun or the man with the drug, and he hasn't got a gold tooth either."

"From what we know of his character I can't really picture him as the leader anyway. I'd say that if he was mixed up in this at all, he would have to be the man with the knife."

"Personally, I can't see him as a member of the gang—he seems too much of a loner to me."

The detectives all tended to think he was innocent. Lieutenant Kaizuka wasn't quite convinced.

"We can't escape the fact that he was in possession of one of the missing banknotes. From our inquiries among the staff at Fuji I think we are all agreed that it was Suzuki who passed the note and on top of that, he hasn't got an alibi for the time of the robbery. December the eighth was a holiday at the temple, and although we can't find any connection between him and the bank, I should think that after walking past it every day for the last twenty years, he should have a good idea of how many people work there and what time the staff would get back."

The detective from the prefectural police thought the same.

"Yes, and also there is no other way that Suzuki could have got hold of the money. As far as we can tell, he has no other income outside his wages from the temple, he doesn't gamble, and no one else in his family is working, so I think there can be only one explanation."

The temple transferred its employees' wages directly into their bank accounts, and although Suzuki had drawn his at the end of the year, the police had checked with the bank and they claimed it

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was impossible for them to have given him that note. The only logical explanation was that he had been one of the gang and had received the note as part of his share. A month after the robbery, when everything seemed to have quieted down, he probably felt that it was safe to use it.

Sato looked around the assembled detectives and said, "Anyway, I propose that we continue our surveillance for a while longer. He doesn't seem to realize we are watching him, so there's still a chance he will use another of the notes or get in touch with the rest of the gang.

"I think if we pull him in for questioning, we might scare off the leader and he's the one we're after. Even though we haven't seen any sign of the rest of the gang, we don't know in what way he's connected with them and we don't want to show our hand too soon."

Sato's suggestion met with the approval of the other officers and as a result the discovery of the note was kept secret and the surveillance was continued.

But Toho City is a small town and however careful the police were in their inquiries, the rumor soon started that Suzuki was being investigated. Someone at the Fuji told one of the other customers that Suzuki had passed one of the stolen notes in the bar and soon after that Suzuki stopped going there and didn't even visit the other bar he had been a regular at.

He would go straight home from the temple and stay indoors, not even venturing into the garden where he might be seen.

Some of the younger detectives began to feel that it was pointless to hold back and said the suspect should be asked to come to the station to answer their questions or that they should search his house. They argued that now that he knew they were suspicious of him, he wasn't likely to use any more of the stolen money; but if they could find even one more note in his house, they could arrest him on the spot.

However, their superiors couldn't agree with this approach because even if he was one of the gang, they were all agreed that he wasn't the leader, and if they were to search the house, they might scare off the other two. Not only this, but there was no guarantee there were any more stolen notes in Suzuki's house, and they might lose the only lead they had. As long as they waited long enough, as long as they were patient, the criminals were sure to give themselves away.

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Almost a fortnight after they started to keep Suzuki under surveillance, he made a move. Although January the nineteenth was a Friday, Suzuki, who had taken the previous Sunday off, went to work as usual. He arrived back home at 4:50 in the afternoon, and the two detectives who had been assigned to him both settled back for an uneventful night until he made his next appearance the following morning.

However at 9:45 that night they were surprised to see Suzuki open the back door and slip out. He was wearing a dark overcoat with the collar turned up, and with both hands thrust into the pockets he hurried off.

The two detectives followed his silhouette and after a short while they realized he was headed for the temple, although he was using the gloomy back streets instead of the main road that he usually took when he went to work.

He seemed to be deep in thought, although he would occasionally pause and look back as if to make sure he wasn't being followed. When he did so, the detectives hid until he moved on again. They both felt the excitement building up inside of them as they were now sure that Suzuki was going to rendezvous with his accomplices.

After a short while he turned into the approach to the temple, and passing under the swooping roof of the main gate, he made his way toward the copper-roofed building that served as the temple office where he worked every day.

There was a light on in the building and judging by the ease with which Suzuki opened the door, it would seem that it hadn't been locked up for the night. The detectives thought this a bit odd and moved to the parking lot where they could keep an eye on the entrance. There were five cars parked there, and among them they recognized the dark red Mercedes which belonged to the Bishop.

The Bishop didn't live on the temple grounds and was driven there every morning by his chauffeur. The other cars belonged to the temple's priests and while the police were watching, another car pulled in bearing the temple's deacon. He was well-known in the town as an astute businessman and the police had no trouble in recognizing his silhouette; but they could not help but notice that he looked more than a little upset as he hurried into the office.

Two more cars pulled into the parking lot and as their occupants walked up to the building, the police recognized them as also being priests of the temple.

No one else turned up and while they couldn't hear any sounds

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from the illuminated room, the two detectives were certain that a secret conference was going on. It seemed strange to them that Suzuki would be included, but they guessed the meeting had probably been called to resolve some problem that involved him.

About an hour later the meeting ended and they all came out separately. There were at least ten of them altogether, with some having come on foot; but none seemed to be talking, and all walked their separate ways. Finally Suzuki came out and, putting on his overcoat again, he walked away deep in thought. He seemed to be depressed and didn't give a second thought to any possible follower as he made his way down the main street toward his home.

The next day the other detectives connected with the case were all excited by the news.

"I've suspected this ever since we first got a lead on Suzuki," one of the younger men said enthusiastically. "The temple was behind the crime from the beginning! Although it was only some of the people at the bottom of the scale who actually committed the crime, I can't help but suspect that it was the higher priests who planned the whole thing."

"We also had the report that the getaway car was seen heading in the direction of the temple."

The chief inspector, however, didn't agree. Folding his arms and shaking his head he said, "But Rinko is so wealthy that most other temples would give anything to change places with it. They get more than a hundred million in contributions at New Year and during the summer festival. That's not to mention what they must earn for funerals and memorial services. On top of it all, their income is of a religious nature and completely tax-free."

"There isn't any building going on at the moment, so all the money goes to maintenance and wages. I can't really see any need for them to rob a bank. You only have to look at the way the priests live, with their big houses and a new car every year, to understand that they're not hard up."

Most of the detectives seemed to agree that it was unlikely that the priests at Rinko would endanger their future like that.

"But even if the priests weren't connected, it doesn't necessarily rule out the fact that the crime may have been committed by Suzuki and a couple of his colleagues."

"Their superiors may have found out about it and are trying to think of some way to cover it up. After all, if word got out that it

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was three employees from the temple who were responsible, it would not do much for the temple's public image."

"Maybe the temple doesn't know that we suspect Suzuki of the bank job, but they heard that we were investigating him and called him in to ask him why."

"You've got a point there."

They could picture Suzuki standing before the priests being questioned about his possible connection with the robbery and as to how and why he had the 10,000-yen note.

It was the answers to these questions that the police wanted, but the only way that they could get them would be to bring him in and interrogate him. But they were beginning to hold the opinion that if Suzuki was a member of the gang, the other two had to be employed at the temple as well, as he didn't appear to have any friends outside the temple. Therefore if they arrested Suzuki, the heads of the temple would destroy the evidence and arrange alibis for the other two in an effort to protect the temple's reputation. If this happened, all Suzuki had to do was say that he had found the note in the street and the whole case would have to be dropped for lack of evidence.

The police decided that for the moment they would just continue with their investigation of Suzuki's background, focusing on possible acquaintances, and once they had enough evidence to build a strong case they would raid the temple and arrest the three men. For the moment, however, they thought it sufficient that they had been able to tie in the temple with Suzuki.

It was two days later that the detectives at Toho City police station were surprised by the news that the bank robbers had been arrested in Oda City. The report came from the prefectural headquarters and stated that at approximately three o'clock in the afternoon of the twenty-second of January a young man in a mah-jongg parlor had asked the cashier to change a 10,000-yen note in order to pay for some noodles he had had delivered.

When she had a chance, the girl at the register checked the serial number, and seeing that it was one on her list, rang the police. Two detectives hurried over and found a young man who looked as if he was in his late teens. When one of the officers asked him a few questions the young man tried to escape but was overpowered and searched. The police found eight more bills whose serial numbers corresponded with those from the robbery. The young man was arrested.

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After being questioned, he confessed that he had robbed the bank on the eighth of December and gave them the names and addresses of his two accomplices. These two were arrested and both confessed. The leader was twenty-six years old, unemployed, the other was a twenty-three-year-old factory worker, and the boy who was caught in the mah-jongg parlor was nineteen years old and unemployed.

They told how they had passed through Toho City two or three times on their way to Tokyo and for some reason the bank there had stuck in their minds. After they decided to rob it, they borrowed the shotgun and car from friends, and the leader had gone to the bank once to check it out. Of the twenty million yen that they stole, the leader took eight million and the other two, six million each. They began to use the old notes to pay off their debts and enjoy themselves, and when these ran out, they started to spend the new ones.

First, they tested one of the new notes on January the first, and after waiting until the fifteenth for a reaction, decided the notes were safe to use. They had been passing them ever since without anyone saying anything, so they were surprised when one of them had been caught at the mah-jongg parlor.

The leader seemed to be proud of the way he had tested the money, and on being asked about it, he answered, "I went to Rinko temple on my own on the first and put one of the notes into the offertory box. I knew that the money would be taken to the bank and that if they had a record of the serial numbers there would be some kind of reaction. However, we didn't hear anything after that and decided it must be safe to use the remainder of our money. I suppose the main reason I chose the temple was that there would be nothing to connect me with the money; also, I wanted to offer the money to Buddha so he would save us from getting caught. It doesn't seem to have helped us very much."

The police checked their stories and came to the conclusion they were telling the truth and had been responsible for the crime. They insisted they didn't know Suzuki and although the police made every effort to find a connection, their inquiries proved fruitless. This could only mean that Suzuki had stolen the 10,000-yen note that he had used in the Fuji bar and that it was the one the leader had put in the offertory box at Rinko temple. In order to check this part of the leader's story, Sato and a constable went to Rinko temple to discuss it with Suzuki.

They asked for Suzuki at the office and heard that he had been

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called to the main temple by the deacon. The two policemen made their way over there and found the Bishop in the middle of conducting the morning service. He was sitting in front of the central effigy, leading the prayers, and on both sides of him ten younger priests joined in the chant. The two policemen could see the deacon in the hall, but they couldn't see any sign of Suzuki. They decided to wait until the priests finished their devotions.

Sato was standing next to the huge offertory box, and looking at it he thought of the one hundred million yen that had been thrown into it by pilgrims during the New Year holiday, and in particular of the 10,000-yen note that the bank robber had dropped in when he prayed that he wouldn't be caught.

However, the main hall was quite a distance from the office and not only that, but during the New Year holiday it would have been so full of people that Sato felt it most unlikely that Suzuki could have stolen the money.

About thirty minutes later the service came to an end, and as the priests filed out, the deacon noticed the two policemen. He looked at Sato for a moment, then exchanged a glance with the Bishop who also looked at Sato. Seeing this, Sato couldn't help but feel that some kind of message had passed between the Bishop and the deacon.

After the priests had followed the Bishop out of the building, the deacon slowly came over to the policemen. He was a fat man wearing yellow buddhist robes, but his shifty eyes, double chin, and poor complexion made it plain that he was more accustomed to making money than to saving souls.

"I'm from the Toho police station," Sato said, but the deacon seemed to know him and didn't show any surprise.

"What can I do for you?"

"We would like to speak to Mr. Suzuki."

"I think you'll find Suzuki in the office."

"We inquired there first but were directed over here."

"That's strange. I called him over here before the service, but he should have returned quite a while ago."

The deacon gave them a puzzled look.

But Suzuki hadn't returned to the office and although the other workers all joined in the search, he could not be found.

"He may have gone home for something," one of the clerks suggested, but when Sato rang his house, his wife said she hadn't heard from him. Sato had a sudden premonition and hurried over to the

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house. Suzuki's wife, Miyako, was waiting outside, and seeing the car, ran over and asked, "Have you found him?"

"No. You haven't heard anything either?"

"No, he hasn't been here."

Miyako shook her head, then clutching Sato's arm she said imploringly, "Please find my husband—he might have—"

It was about an hour later when one of the policemen who had joined the search found Suzuki's body hanging from a tree in the woods behind the temple. He had tied a hemp rope to the branch of an oak tree and hanged himself. It was about two hours since he died and this would coincide with the time he left the main hall to return to the office.

His clothes were unruffled and his shoes neatly placed at the foot of the tree, so it seemed most unlikely that he had been attacked. The only strange thing was that he had taken his socks off and put them in his shoes before he hanged himself, and the surrounding area was so covered with his footprints that it almost seemed as if he had made them on purpose.

After the body had been taken to a nearby hospital for an autopsy, Sato took Miyako to the police station and led her into a small room.

"Have you any idea why your husband committed suicide?" Sato asked Miyako in a quiet voice.

She didn't answer and sat chewing her lip, deep in thought.

The police hadn't found a suicide note and although they asked the other people at the temple, they all replied that they had no idea why he should do something like that. But judging from the way in which Miyako had begged him to look for her husband, Sato thought she might have reason to suspect something.

"Didn't you half expect this to happen?"

Miyako still didn't answer and gazed into space in silence, her eyes swollen with crying.

"Even if your husband didn't actually tell you he was going to kill himself, you must have known if he was worried about something. Personally, I get the feeling that your husband was trying to give us a message. I don't think he left those footprints in the mud by accident, but I'm afraid I don't know what he was driving at."

Miyako looked up slowly and after staring at Sato for a few minutes she seemed to make up her mind.

"I think he was trying to make us think of the 'sole of the foot'."

"What?"

"I think he left all those footprints in an effort to lead us to them."

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Her eyes gradually came into focus and she seemed, if anything, more grief-stricken than before.

"I see now how much he must have suffered to have chosen this way to try and tell us what he could never have brought himself to say while he was still alive. It's the same as if they had killed him themselves!"

She almost shouted the last words and then collapsed to the table, her whole body wrenched by sobs of sorrow and frustration.

Sato waited until she subsided, then forcing himself to sound calm, he asked, "Who did you mean by that?"

"The Bishop, the deacon, and all the other people in charge of the temple."

"Why would they want to do that to your husband?"

"Because he knew about the 'sole of the foot'."

"Just what exactly do you mean by this 'sole of the foot'?"

Miyako wiped her eyes, then took a deep breath. "Only a few people at the temple use the expression now, but originally it referred to the New Year of festivals when the temple was very crowded. The people would hide the money that didn't go into the offertory box with the soles of their feet and steal it when no one was watching."

"I see, but why do you say only a few people at the temple know its meaning now?"

"These days it refers to the way in which the priests share the offerings among themselves. My husband once told me that it was the same at all the big temples.

"Every year the papers announce how many people visited the temple and how much money was donated, but in reality the temples have decided on these figures in advance and all the money above this estimate is divided among the priests. It's been going on for years now, and they refer to it among themselves as the 'sole of the foot'."

Sato nodded to himself as he realized the full significance of the footprints, then his mind went back to the deacon's fat face and the chauffeur-driven cars.

"The papers estimated that 1,700,000 people visited the temple this New Year, and donated approximately 100,000,000 yen. But my husband told me that while the temple actually received 120,000,000 yen, it announced a total of only 80,000,000."

"Do you mean that the priests divided the remaining forty million between them?"

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"Yes. Their shares were set a long time ago. If I remember rightly, the chief priest gets fifteen percent, the deacon and three other high priests get ten percent each, and the remainder is divided among the other priest. My husband and other section chiefs are given a small bonus."

"That would mean that the chief priest got six million . . . and you say that he embezzles that much every New Year and festival? How much did your husband get? About one million?"

"He told me that he was given 750,000 yen this year, but in his case it was rather to keep him from talking than anything else. The whole system was a well guarded secret at the temple and they weren't allowed to talk about it even to their families. We'd been married for ten years before my husband finally told me about it."

"How did he get the money? In cash?"

"Yes. On the third of January the financial department starts to count the donations in a basement room of the temple. The chief priest, the deacon, and the other high priests are all present while this is being done, and as soon as they have reached the official amount, they divide the extra between them. My husband and the priests who weren't present at the counting wait in a separate room, and when the count is finished, their shares are brought out to them."

"I suppose the 10,000-yen note in question was part of your husband's share?"

"Yes, I can't think of any other explanation."

The stolen 10,000-yen note had found its way from the offertory box to Suzuki's pocket, but he, not knowing that it was stolen, had used it quite openly at the Fuji bar. When the temple leaders learned that Suzuki was being watched by the police, they must have become very worried. The meeting the police had witnessed was obviously called in order to decide what the temple should do to cover itself and not be connected with the bank robbery.

"What was your husband told to tell the police if he was asked where he got the 10,000-yen note?"

"First, the deacon told him to say he found it in the street, but when it was announced in the papers that one of the thieves had donated the money to the temple—"

"Yes, what was he to say then? No one would believe he had found it in the street."

"For two days now, ever since the report appeared in the papers, he has been called by the chief priest and deacon countless times

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and ordered to say that he stole the money from the offertory box. In that way only he would be faced with a scandal and the temple would remain safe.

"Of course he couldn't continue to work at the temple after that, but they promised him that although they would have to discharge him, they would guarantee his wages for the rest of his life.

"As I understand it, by not declaring all their income they are guilty of embezzlement and not only they but the temple itself would not be likely to survive the scandal if the facts became public. They tried to frighten my husband, saying that not only would Rinko temple be ruined but all the big temples would come under scrutiny and it would be the end of religion in Japan. They told him that it would be best for everyone if he was to say he stole the money, but that Buddha knew the truth and would protect him.

"That's why he was called to the main temple before the service this morning—to persuade him to take the blame.

"I'm sure that was it. My husband was always very timid, but he was also an honest man. He didn't like to take the money in the first place, but he realized that if he was going to work in the temple, he would have to go along with its customs. However, when he was told to pretend he'd stolen the money, it was too much for him. Even though they told him they would look after him for life, it would leave a stain on his character that he could never get rid of."

Miyako shuddered as she thought of the anguish her husband had had to bear.

"But I don't think he had the strength to expose the plot either, so in the end he settled the problem by sacrificing himself for the greed of the priests. But leaving all those footprints around the tree as a clue, I think that deep down he really wanted to bring the case out into the open."

Sato could still visualize the footprints under the body hanging from the oak tree. Suzuki had made them carefully, using his whole weight to imprint his bitterness in the mud.

Lieutenant Sato saw that he too would have to proceed carefully, step by step, if he wanted to find the proof necessary to convict the leaders of such a large and famous temple of so serious and shocking a crime.

Sato suddenly stood up and, walking over to the window, gave a deep sigh. All he could see outside were a few lonely snowflakes falling to the empty stone-paved approach to the temple.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

WHAT ABOUT MURDER?: My fellow columnist Jon L. Breen has just published his first full-length book, and it's one that belongs on the shelf of everyone with more than a passing interest in the mystery. *What About Murder?,* subtitled *A Guide to Books About Mystery and Detective Fiction,* is far more than a bibliography of critical and biographical studies. It is an annotated guide to 239 books published through the end of 1980, divided into seven sections: general histories, reference books, special subjects, collected essays and reviews, technical manuals, coffee-table books, and works on individual authors. The annotations, often several paragraphs long, amount to full-scale insightful reviews of each book listed, pointing out strong points and errors where they exist. An index of authors, titles, and major subjects is especially helpful.

The book includes a brief foreword by Ellery Queen and is published by Scarecrow Press, P.O. Box 656, Metuchen, NJ 08840. It's worth noting that the price for this 175-page hardbound book is just $10.00, at a time when similar small-press volumes are often priced at three or four times that figure. Breen, a reference librarian at Rio Hondo College who reviews mysteries for *Wilson Library Bulletin* as well as for *EQMM,* has produced an important and welcome book. If I were using the rating system from his column, I'd give it four stars.

SAYERS AND OTHERS: These days it seems that new biographical and critical studies of Dorothy L. Sayers are even outnumbering the books about Agatha Christie. Of special interest is Dawson Gaillard's *Dorothy L. Sayers,* the first full-length critical study devoted solely to Sayers' detective fiction. It's one in the increasingly valuable Recognitions series published by Frederick Ungar (paper, $5.95). General editor for future volumes in the detective/suspense section of Recognitions will be Bruce Cassiday, former fiction editor of *Argosy,* who is planning several new titles for 1982 publication.

But Christie and Sayers aren't the only female mystery writers worthy of critical attention, as Earl F. Bargainnier ably demonstrates in *Ten Women of Mystery,* recently pub-

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lished by Bowling Green University Popular Press (paper, $10.95). The ten authors discussed in detail are Sayers, Josephine Tey, Ngaio Marsh, P. D. James, Ruth Rendell, Anna Katharine Green, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Margaret Millar, Emma Lathen, and Amanda Cross.

MYSTERIOUS PRESS: Two new titles are due from the Mysterious Press (129 West 56th St., New York, NY 10019) in September. One is Brian Garfield's *Checkpoint Charlie,* a collection of his Charlie Dark stories from *EQMM,* slightly revised to form more of an episodic novel. The jacket design is by Garfield's mother, the artist and illustrator Frances O'Brien, and this is the first time she's done the cover for one of her son's books.

The other September title from Mysterious Press is a specially bound, signed, and slipcased edition of Stephen King's new horror novel *Cujo.* The limited edition of 750 numbered copies is priced at $75.00 each. Viking Press will publish the trade edition in October.

RABBI SMALL: Harry Kemelman's best-selling sleuth Rabbi David Small, who starred in seven novels named for the days of the week, takes on a new role explaining the meaning of Judaism in *Conversations with Rabbi Small,* just published by Morrow. An author's use of a fictional detective as spokesman in a non-fiction thesis is rare indeed. The only other instance which comes to mind is Dorothy L. Sayers' use of Lord Peter Wimsey in a series of essays she wrote for the *Spectator* during the early days of World War II.

CRIMINOUS GATHERINGS: Dilys Winn has launched a monthly series of crime tours and mystery gatherings under the general title "The Route of All Evil." A schedule of fall events and reservation details may be had from The Route of All Evil, 1 East 42nd St., Suite 805, New York. NY 10017.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Allen J. Hubin will be honored as Fan of the Year at Bouchercon XII in Milwaukee, October 9–11.

Following publication of their critically praised anthology *The Arbor House Treasury of Horror and the Supernatural* in June, editors Bill Pronzini, Barry N. Malzberg, and Martin H. Greenberg are completing work on *The Arbor House Treasury of Mystery and Suspense.* The mammoth anthology, to be published next spring, has an introduction by John D. MacDonald and stories by Pearl S. Buck, Stanley Ellin, Erle Stanley Gardner, Michael Gilbert, Ross Macdonald, Bernard Malamud, Ngaio Marsh, Ed McBain, Joyce Carol Oates, Mickey Spillane, John Steinbeck, Julian Symons, and many others.

Best-selling suspense novelist Mary Higgins Clark is completing a new novel for publication next spring by Simon & Schuster. Working title is *A Cry for Help.*

Graham Greene is working on a new novel about a Spanish priest and an ex-Communist mayor who go off to battle evil much in the manner of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

The long low building of Cinecittà, bleached by the Italian sun, stretched as far back as the eye could see from its imposing but rusting front gates, sitting by the side of a wide road leading from a quiet suburb of Rome. Europe's foremost film studio, its name literally translating as Movie City, had been the site where the legendary *Cleopatra* was made, the Roman Empire fell on screen, and *Ben Hur* raced his chariot. The more than 700 movies produced there across the years had its share of suspense films, including *Von Ryan's Express, The Pink Panther,* and Stanley Ellin's *House of Cards.* EQMN visited its massive sound stages recently during a quick exploration of mystery-film activity in Europe.

Alas, although the giant studio complex—ten stages in all, and complete editing facilities—quietly awaits new production, Cinecittà is currently empty, with only a small comedy now shooting exteriors in Milan on its schedule. Even the fabled backlot is—with the exception of an artificial lagoon (the one on which Elizabeth Taylor sailed as Queen of the Nile)—a barren, grassy field. Could this be? Ancient Rome once towered here, and the catacombs and caves where Hercules slew a dozen demons and monsters! (Actually, the same imperial columns, the same shadowy stalactites seemed recognizable in film after film.) A desert outpost was built here for John Wayne in *Legend of the Lost,* Saigon for Graham Greene's *The Quiet American.* Where had all these standing sets gone?

Broken down and only in some cases saved, an official explained, for the strong Roman sun would whiten and weaken any outside set standing too long. Very sad, and hard to believe, for can the Southern California sun—under which Universal Studio Tours basks with its endless backlot streets and fronts—be much less damaging?

Cinecittà is state-run and its rules hard to fathom, explains Dario Argento, Europe's greatest thriller director. He films elsewhere, at a smaller studio in the heart of Rome, where last year he finished *Inferno,* a mystery about a strange, centuries-old house in a crumbling square to which are drawn a young brother and sister with Corsican sensitivity. The film was a shuddery smash throughout Europe, but its American release was delayed by a change of management at Fox, the U.S. distributor; hopefully it will turn up this year.

Argento, who has distinguished himself in our genre with films from *Bird with the Crystal Plumage* to *Deep Red,* creates themes which seem to reflect much of the spirit of Rome itself: the city is dark, winding, ancient, pulsing with life and with interesting glimpses of buildings at every turn. Baroque buildings are an Argento speciality, and his passionate tour of Roman squares, with their magnificent statuary (gods, nymphs, demons, beasts, centaurs, and leaping fish) and fountains, can be seen

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as the colorful backdrop for mystery and murder in all his films—the Rome through which blind Karl Malden stumbles in *Cat O' Nine Tails* and young musician Michael Brandon is terrorized in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet.*

Dario Argento's next film, however, will be shot completely in Los Angeles, if the looming director's-strike there permits. It will be a whodunit, close to Chandler territory, in which a young film director in an attempt to unravel an incident shrouded in the past sparks several murders. One of the victims will be a film critic from a well known mystery magazine.

French television has in the past few years increased its tempo of quality mystery drama. A good deal of Simenon has been done for the screen, including *The Ringing at Bicetre* (Bicetre is a Paris hospital) in which the editor of a scandal magazine, recuperating from a stroke, has the opportunity to reflect on his own past. Crime-solvers on French TV have been a colorful and varied lot. They include Magistrate Julien Fontanes, who in an interesting series deals with cases involving prisoners: lifers, petty, escaped, and otherwise. Or a village priest, Father Quettehou, who is sure the strangler of a teenage girl is not one of his parishioners and sets out to prove it. Or the shy Octave, charged with the death of a villainous real-estate tycoon when actually only trying to come to the victim's rescue, who becomes a hero to everyone but the real killer, who thinks he's seen too much. Or the patrician Evangeline Saint Leger, an aroused tigress when her son is suspected of murdering his pregnant girl friend, a sleek drama that is pure Gallic Christie as might be filmed by Hitchcock. And there was also a stunning adaptation of William Irish's *Rendez-vous en Noir.*

Even French television mystery series are especially lively. Pensioner Desiré Lefarge finds age no barrier as he pokes at murder in train stations, holiday camps, church fairs. *Trafics* deals with smuggling, dramas featuring a French chief inspector and a German colleague. The most popular recent series, however, has deservedly been *Commissaire Moulin, Police Judiciaire*—thirteen well constructed detective stories featuring a young, "new-style" police inspector who is compassionate and energetic. The cases are varied (murder at a fashion house, in the Metro, in a chapel) and interesting.

Paris theater also dazzles. Currently *Arsenic and Old Lace,* in translation, is a revival hit. And at the Lido, the most celebrated nightclub in the world, zeppelin *Hindenburg* is sabotaged and bursts into flames before our eyes every night. (The pyrotechnics are so awesome they can only be managed once an evening, so the tableau is dropped for the second show.) In the City of Light—and beyond question Paris is the home of the spectacle stage—melodrama is not neglected.

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INTERVIEW: MICHAEL GILBERT (2)

This is the conclusion of an interview that began in the previous issue.

EQMN: Smallbone Deceased (Harper & Row, 1950) is considered by many to be your masterwork. Do you agree?

GILBERT: I hope not. I would like to be judged, always, by my last.

EQMN: It has been a great treat to watch Patrick Petrella's rise from constable to Detective Chief Inspector. Have you personally spent much time in Scotland Yard in the course of his career?

GILBERT: A certain amount. In the course of a projected article on the police I spent the better part of a fortnight in and out of their various establishments. The bit I enjoyed most was being whizzed round in police cars.

EQMN: You've hit an exciting new stride with the Calder and Behrens counter-intelligence series, one that would be impossible without an involved awareness of the world political scene and your skill at characterization, which Julian Symons has called "far from perfunctory."

GILBERT: If you're asking if I'm a member of M.I. 6 in my spare time, the answer is no.

EQMN: Rasselas is wonderful. Do you have a Persian deerhound—or any animals?

GILBERT: At the moment, two English setters, a tabby cat, a goat, and about 30 fantail pigeons.

EQMN: You served in the Royal Horse Artillery during World War II, were captured by the Germans and imprisoned in North Italy in 1943, and escaped when the Italians surrendered. What are your thoughts on the experience these many years later?

GILBERT: The real snag about the war is that one forgets how long ago it was and this affects both books and life. I am still apt to give characters in their middle forties and fifties impossible wartime backgrounds and experiences. I also, but more rarely now, talk about the war to people I know and am surprised when they say, "Of course I was at school then."

EQMN: You seem unafraid of being sensitive and harrowing in your work—and in the *same* work, which makes both elements all the more effective. But isn't it painful for you?

GILBERT: This question surprises me. I am much more often accused of being insensitive—and indeed I think I am.

Being harrowing is the other side of the coin. A good "harrow" can sell a lot of copies.

EQMN: You've given us characters capable of shattering courage, the courage all the more effective because there is intelligence as well as emotion behind it. Do you believe an act of bravery inspired by intelligence *or* the emotions can have the same impact as one inspired by both?

GILBERT: The best description of courage I ever read was in a letter to the *Times* from Bernard Shaw at a moment when people were pouring out a lot of rather silly adolation on the captain of *The Titanic.* I cannot give it to you verbatim, but what he

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saw was that courage was the expression of a fine character in action in adverse circumstances. Surrounding circumstances such as darkness, storms, and a waste of waters might heighten the dramatic effect, but they were nothing to do with the actions themselves. He added that all the captain had really done was run into an iceberg. This annoyed other correspondents a lot.

EQMN: Do you have any ideas on crime and punishment you'd care to give?

GILBERT: Logically, I would restore capital punishment only for the killing of a policeman in uniform and on duty. I would do so because I think it preferable to arm the police with this severe sanction to arming them with guns. But you have to do one or the other.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

When Charles Dickens died in 1870, he left as part of his literary legacy a puzzle that has fascinated readers, writers, and amateur detectives ever since: *The Mystery of Edwin Drood.* Not only was the final Dickens novel unfinished, the author left no notes or outlines to tell what solution he envisioned. Among the only clues were casual remarks to friends and instructions to the novel's illustrators. Many other writers have tried to finish *Drood* over the last hundred and eleven years, and recent months have seen a new spurt of Droodian interest.

Not being a Dickens scholar, I can't compare Leon Garfield's new completion of *Drood* (Pantheon, $12.95) with earlier attempts, though I know enough of the various theories to realize that Garfield does not attempt any major surprises. He is less concerned with constructional ingenuity than with a duplication of Dickens' style, and in this area he triumphs. The final nineteen chapters (123 pages to Dickens' 202) are a masterful pastiche of the prose found in the first twenty-two. Equally true to Dickens' characters, Garfield does not ask us to believe the impossible. The resultant work is not a curiosity but a full, rich, remarkably seamless Victorian novel.

*** Margaret Forster: *The Bride of Lowther Fell,* Atheneum, $11.95. The author of *Georgy Girl* blends a leisurely style of DuMaurierlike grace with a very contemporary sensibility to create an unusual romantic suspense novel. Alexandra Grove, inheriting an unwanted and unlovable nephew when her sister and brother-in-law die in a plane crash, takes him from London to rural Cumbria to build a new life for them both. The mystery element, though vital, is relatively muted. With a liberated heroine, the question is not just who will be the hero, but will there be one at all?

*** John D. MacDonald: *Free Fall in Crimson,* Harper and Row, $10.95. The nineteenth Travis McGee adventure involves moviemaking, motorcycle gangs, and hot-air ballooning

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with the usual sex, murder, business, and social commentary (including a fascinating dialogue on computers on pages 118–120). It ends with a slightly too-well-calculated human interest hook for the next book. This is decidedly lesser McGee, but still highly readable and enjoyable.

*** Len Deighton: *XPD,* Knopf, $12.95. This is another espionage novel of the dark-secret-buried-back-in-WWII type, as expertly done as the Deighton byline promises. If the author were not going in for initialisms in his titles, he could have called this book *The Hitler Minutes* or *The Churchill Revision.*

*** Janwillem van de Wetering: *The Mind-Murders,* Houghton Mifflin, $9.95. Van de Wetering's latest Amsterdam police procedural is an odd one even for him, both harsher and (paradoxically) more philosophically rarefied than his earlier novels. Though it can be recommended without hesitation to his fans, it is definitely *not* the van de Wetering to read first.

*** Julian Rathbone: *Base Case,* Pantheon, $9.95. Recovering from alleged mental problems accrued in an earlier Rathbone thriller, *The Euro-Killers,* Jan Argand is assigned to be security advisor on a locally opposed nuclear-base project in the Virtue Islands.

A convention of scholars of the local Great Author allows Rathbone to satirize professors of literature. This is well written international intrigue that presents a reviewer's dilemma: I can tell it's good, but I can't pretend it's my cup of tea.

*** Simon Gray: *Stage Struck,* Seaver, $9.95 (cloth), $4.95 (paper). The new play from the celebrated author of *Butley* and *Otherwise Engaged* is a four-character jack-in-the-box thriller in the tradition of Anthony Shaffer's *Sleuth* and Ira Levin's *Deathtrap.* Some of the surprises will prove all too predictable for fans of the genre, but the shocks probably work beautifully on the stage and the witty dialogue makes for fast and enjoyable reading.

*** Max Byrd: *California Thriller,* Bantam, $2.25. Here is a bang-up debut in the hardboiled vein, somewhere between Raymond Chandler and Ian Fleming in plot and reminiscent of Robert B. Parker in style. San Francisco private eye Mike Haller's mannered prose is explained by a journalistic background and literary aspirations. (Marlowe and Archer never bothered to explain.) Byrd is a quotable writer, given to pointed social observations, funny satirical set-pieces, and odd medical facts—including a credible explanation of why pirates wore earrings.

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"Q"

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CLERIHEWS

CLERIHEW TO THE LINE AND LET

THE QUIPS FALL WHERE THEY MAY!

by C. SAND CHILDS

Edmund Clerihew Bentley,
Cogitating intently,
Evolved a verse form to express his views;
Modestly christened it clerihews.

Ellery Queen
Can make the scene
With murder plots from womb to tomb
And works his magic on the well locked room.

Robert Twohy
Is certainly *sui*
Generis, rare bird,
With his mystery stories of the absurd.

Florence V. Mayberry
Is essence of bayberry
Spiked with definite crime
That shocks every time.

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"Q"

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What is tonight's category on "Battling for Bucks"?

GAME SHOW

by GARY ALEXANDER

Welcome back once again, ladies and gentlemen, to *Battling for Bucks*. With us for an unprecedented third visit is our defending champion, Mr. Melvin Cannard, who has *literally* destroyed his competition in the previous category of World War One Dogfights.

Tonight Melvin will tell us if he will take the $13,765 he has amassed thus far, plus the frost-free refrigerator and the vacation to Tulsa, or if he will face yet another challenger and risk all *Battling for Bucks*. And if he does decide to enter our computerized combat arena, how much longer can his incredible winning streak continue?

Johnny, what is our category for tonight?

There it is, folks, on our amazing giant screen behind our contestants—Starship Showdown. A futuristic scenario and a real toughie! How about it, Melvin? We need your decision.

You are. By golly I had that hunch. There's no backing Melvin down. Let's hear it for a real battler, ladies and gentlemen!

And let's find out who Melvin's opponent is. A hearty welcome, please, for Marine Corps Corporal Billy Joe Prentice, who hails from Various Falls, Alabama. Anyone out there in our studio audience from Various Falls? No? How about Marine veterans? I thought so and, folks, don't our Leathernecks do *such* a grand job in peacetime and in war?

But before our battle commences, let's find out some more about our current champ. Melvin, you've already told us that you are an unemployed bookkeeper from Scranton. Your hobbies include what? Horticulture and explosives. That's an unusual combination, Melvin, but it doesn't surprise me a bit because, folks, Melvin has proven to be a real character, and a heckuva practical joker besides. Now don't be modest, Mel. And, ladies and gentlemen, don't let our champion's hard expression fool you. Beneath that grim exterior lies a

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unique sense of humor. In fact, Melvin had me in stitches backstage, just prior to the show, kidding and teasing and joking. But I'll get to that in more detail later.

Ah, on to our game. Melvin, you have the option of initial attack or passing. You will? Marvelous!

All right, before we proceed, let me explain the rules of *Battling for Bucks* to you first-time viewers. Melvin must now select a level of difficulty by moving one of his battle pieces into a red grid on our amazing giant screen. The closer he moves a ship to one of Billy Joe's and the more important his ship is, the more difficult the question is and, of course, the more money it's worth. If he answers correctly, not only is the money his, he may either maneuver that ship again or fire at Billy Joe's with our exclusive, computerized, simulated death-laser. Answer incorrectly, however, and Billy Joe gets the money and a shot. The game is played until one side is totally destroyed. We take no prisoners on *Battling for Bucks!*

Melvin, you've selected an inner grid, well within range of two of Billy Joe's starships. And a correct answer is worth $1000. I *knew* we'd have a hard-hitting contest tonight. Melvin showed us what he was made of last week the way he slashed through his opponent. And Billy Joe, being a fighting Marine—well, what more can you say?

Is that our bonus flare just being shot up? Johnny, tell us what Melvin will win in addition to the $1000 if he answers correctly, please.

Simply marvelous! With that outboard motor and a year's supply of butterscotch wafers, Melvin, you'll be the envy of your entire neighborhood.

All right, Melvin, listen carefully and take your time. It's not going to be an easy question. From which North American country did the Monroe Doctrine originate?

That's absolutely correct, Melvin. Oh, my, there go two of Billy Joe's ships, but don't be discouraged, Billy Joe. You've got plenty of remaining firepower for a counteroffensive. And, Billy Joe, you've chosen to be conservative on your first move. *Very* sound strategy. Your $50 question will allow you to move your astrocruiser out of range of Melvin's galactic submarine.

Before Billy Joe's question, however, I'd like to finish my little story about Melvin. Just prior to his first appearance on *Battling for Bucks,* he took me aside and said he'd tamper with the brakes on my Mercedes if I didn't juggle the questions so he'd have an easy

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time of it. Furthermore, last week, he said he'd kidnap my wife if I didn't do more of the same and provide the opposition with really difficult questions. Naturally we all know he was kidding and Melvin's had to come up with some *awfully* hard answers to stay on top. Now stop frowning at me, Melvin. It was all in fun, right? And fun is what *Battling for Bucks* is all about. Tonight's threat was even tougher, but I'll tell you about it after the completion of this round and messages from our wonderful sponsors.

But back to business. Billy Joe, your question for $50 is: In 1588 Sir Francis Drake led the destruction of the Spanish Armada. What is the name of his favorite horse?

Oh, that's a shame. Trigger isn't right but it was a heckuva fine guess. Little harm was done, Billy Joe, because you played it so close to the vest. Melvin, your move, please.

Goodness, into the epicenter! That means $5000 for a correct answer and certain destruction of Billy Joe's fleet. What daring! Everything is riding on this, ladies and gentlemen, for if Melvin answers wrong—and he hasn't faltered once yet—*his* fleet is a sitting duck for Billy Joe's destroyers.

Consider this question carefully, Melvin. It is of the greatest difficulty. In 1492 an Italian explorer financed by the Queen of Spain set out for—

Excuse me a moment, folks. Yes, Johnny? Thank you, Johnny. Ladies and gentlemen, our studio judges have ruled that since two history questions have already been asked this evening, the next one should be more topical. Now, now, now, Melvin. Relax. Show us to be the flexible competitor we all know you are.

Here, Melvin, is your substitute question. How long would it take a crack bomb squad of a metropolitan police department to locate a bomb in a moderately sized television studio?

That was the buzzer, Melvin. Don't you at least want to try? Oh, I'm *so* sorry. The correct answer is fifteen minutes after I called them. Melvin, you really must have known I would. Your previous threats involved me personally and I had no witnesses, but tonight's threat jeopardized the lives of many wonderful and innocent people, so I had to call your bluff even though I was certain you were again merely kidding. I'm *so* disappointed in you, Melvin.

Uh oh. Billy Joe has just pushed the death-laser button and vaporized your entire fleet, along with all the cash you have accumulated thus far. Isn't that a spectacular sight up there on our giant screen, folks?

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Now let's have a standing ovation for our boys in blue who have just stepped onto our stage. And just look at that device the sergeant is carrying. How quaint, Melvin. Three sticks of dynamite and an alarm clock set for five minutes after the conclusion of the show.

Officers, could you wait a moment before escorting Melvin away? We want you to have as a consolation prize, Melvin, five cases of Kitti Konnoisseur cat food and a free lube coupon for Joe's Garage. Melvin, please don't struggle with the police officers. It's *so* tacky, and you really couldn't expect to be available for next week's show, anyway, could you?

Let's have a round of applause for Melvin and for Billy Joe Prentice, our new champion. Johnny, would you introduce the next challenger, *please?*

"Q"

And speaking of trouble . . .

TALK SHOW

by GARY ALEXANDER

Mark, I think you oughta shut your mouth and stop squinting at that camera they hold your idiot cards next to because the guy that holds them cards for you accidentally got his hand caught under the camera and he's not feeling too good right now, if you know what I mean, and the guest you got scheduled next ain't gonna be able to make it anyway, so I'm filling in for him and tickled pink about it too, being in the same studio with you and these other celebrities who came on earlier, like Lance on my left, who I gotta agree with when he says the jerks badmouthing his TV series are crazy, because any show about a private eye with a kangaroo for a partner has to be a sure-fire hit, and the same goes for Gigi here, who's been plugging her upcoming variety hour, and it don't matter a bit to me, honey, that you don't sing and dance no better than you

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do, for a guy'd have to be stumbling around with a white cane not to notice your offsetting qualities, which brings me back to you, Mark, and that sour puss you're wearing, which just ain't like you at all, which bugs me a little because I don't ever remember watching your show when you didn't have a big smile plastered all over your face, so I'd appreciate it if you'd settle down and relax, since I hear all these talk shows are taped, like when I see one and you got some guest on who's been dead for two months and don't tell me that ain't spooky, so all we gotta do is erase this part of it, which is what my associates backstage who been baby-sitting your crew are gonna do and I bet they're having a ball with all them buttons and switches, and it's gonna be the same ball game when I visit Merv and Mike, who I swear you guys gotta be triplets, but on to business, Mark, that being right off the top I'm telling you I ain't gonna sing or cook today, even though most all your guests do, and so you don't get all bent outta shape about it, lemme explain that where I grew up a boy just didn't sing, whether it be in some choir or just walking down the street going tra-la-la, otherwise you got chased home from school for the rest of your life, and the same goes for cooking, because if word got out that you liked to mess around in the kitchen, you were in the same kind of trouble, and speaking of trouble and of this author guy I'm taking over for, Mark, I just can't understand why you invited him on in the first place because every writer I ever saw on your show was some quack doctor or another who wrote himself a best seller when he dreamed up a new angle on dieting or sex, and all this Patterson guy did was type up a bookful of garbage and lies, although the title *The Inside Horrors of Organized Crime* is kinda catchy, and it is a real shame about him accidentally falling off the sidewalk in front of that bus when he was on his way over to your studio, but with all them broken ribs, Mark, it might be sorta painful for him to sit here and talk to you, and it won't do his busted hip no good at all to sit in one of your cheapo plastic chairs either, and he wouldn't have anything to say anyhow, since the deal is that he was telling some people over at the hospital that he just realized he made a whole bunch of mistakes in his book, so he's gonna rewrite it after he gets well and make a *true* story out of it, so as far as me and my associates are concerned, Mark, you can have this Patterson on your show *after* he corrects all his mistakes, but we'd be a little annoyed if you tried to talk to him at the hospital now, since we figure it would be awful cruel to get a badly injured patient all worked up and if you did he might have a relapse,

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if you know what I mean, and, Mark, hey, hey, hey, there you go twisting your face up like a prune so I don't hardly recognize that happy soul I watch most every day just before Yogi Bear comes on, and I'm thinking now that maybe you're upset over me refusing to sing or cook like Lance and Gigi did, so tell you what I'm gonna do, if Lance will get up there and clean up the mess he made when he did his Delaware-style chili, I'll whip us up a coupla cheeseburgers, but don't expect no miracles, and Mark, while you're sitting here enjoying your cheeseburger, maybe we oughta talk about accidents, and how they can happen to anybody, even talk-show hosts . . .

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

GRAVE TONES

by JAMES HOLDING

Beneath this melancholy stone
Lies gangster "Ladies Man" Falcone,
Whose wife prepared his final meal
Of lightly breaded baby veal
And crispy French fries on the side
Lightly flavored with cyanide.

Here lies riveter Rosie Purder,
Whose boy friend pushed her off a girder,
Then, feeling bad when they interred her,
Confessed to Purder's girder murder.

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a *NEW* Uncle Abner story by

JOHN F. SUTER

When the bell in the ringing chamber of the church tolled the death knell, the number of strokes informed the countryside who had died—a child, a woman, or a man. The bell had "such a voice that when the Lord calls with it, people will listen." And especially Uncle Abner, that tower of the Lord's strength, will listen. "Evil has entered this house and must be rooted out" . . .

NINE STROKES OF THE BELL

by JOHN F. SUTER

It was a bright, crisp day in early October. In the clear air, the sound of death carried a long way.

My father and I were in the wagon, taking the plow to Randall Dorsey's blacksmith shop on the far outskirts of town. It had blunted and dulled on some unexpected rocks in one of the cornfields, and it was a good time to have it readied for use in the spring.

I was driving the team. My father had recently slipped on a patch of wet mud. In falling, he put out his right arm to break the impact and dislocated his shoulder. He was not greatly harmed, but his muscles were stiff and painful. Until he recovered, certain of his tasks fell to me. At age twenty, the chores were easy to perform.

We were still some distance from the new, brick Methodist church when I heard a strange, muffled thud, followed by a confused clangor. My father and I looked at each other.

"The church bell must have slipped in some way," I said.

"Hiram Ashworth's hand slipped on the bell rope, more likely," my father replied.

The bell, new as the church and commanding in tone, began to

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toll with slow, heavy strokes. I began to count, for it was not a summons to a service.

One . . . two . . . three . . .

I automatically slowed the team, in respect for someone as yet unidentified.

Four . . . It was not a child. The bell would have ceased on the third stroke.

Five . . . six . . . We were still several hundred feet from the church.

Seven . . .

It had to be a man, then. Six strokes for a woman. Nine strokes for the death of a man.

Eight . . . nine.

I looked at my father. "Who?"

He shook his head. "Listen. When he tolls out the age, that might tell us."

The bell remained silent.

My father gestured with his left hand. "Pull up across from the church and go ask Ashworth. Your mother will want to know." He leaned over the footboard and spat in the dust. "Not that I don't, myself."

I did as he asked. There was no need to tether the team, since he could keep them checked in spite of his injury. I crossed the street and went up the small flight of stone steps to the door of the church, which was usually left unlocked. From the vestibule, I went up to the belfry, looking for Hiram Ashworth, the sexton.

I entered the ringing chamber, where Ashworth stood to toll the bell. The instrument, itself, hung in the belfry, above.

There was no one there. The rope hung loose from the garter-hole in the ceiling above, moving faintly.

Thinking that the man might have climbed up to the bell, I called to him: "Ashworth."

There was no reply.

Ashworth had not come out of the door of the church. He might be elsewhere in the building, or he might have left by the side door, at the other end.

My face was upturned as I listened for a reply from above. I moved my head slightly, before going down into the church. As I did, my attention was frozen.

I was looking at the bell rope, still yellow in its newness, still with its distinctive smell. Up near the hole in the ceiling, the rope had

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a scarlet strand. As I looked, the strand lengthened, spiraling around, creeping toward the floor.

I wasted no time. I was not certain of the thing I saw, but I felt that help was needed. I ran from the room and out of the church as fast as I could.

As I raced to the wagon, I saw my Uncle Abner standing beside it talking to my father.

My father's thoughts must have been fixed on that strange death knell. "Who was it?" he called before I even reached them.

I shook my head. "There's no one there," I gasped, "and blood is running down the bell rope."

My uncle acted as soon as I had the words out. He tethered the team almost before my father had a chance to move.

"This could be a time when we are all needed," he said over his shoulder as he started for the church. "Even you, Rufus, handicapped as you are."

I hurried on his heels, without attempting to help my father. He was already sensitive about his accident, and I could see that he was annoyed at being given orders by his brother. He would get over it.

When I entered the ringing chamber, I could see that a small puddle of blood had formed on the floor at the bottom of the rope. Uncle Abner was already ascending the small, rough stair along the wall toward the trap in the belfry floor. The door of the trap was open.

Abner's head and shoulders disappeared through the opening. Then he stopped climbing suddenly, and I heard him suck in his breath.

"Martin," he said. Without seeing his face, I could tell he was shaken. "Martin," he repeated, "is Rufus there?"

"He's just entering the church," I said.

"Ask him to go to the undertaker's and bring Roberts."

"Who is it?" I asked. "He'll want to know."

"I am not certain," Abner replied. "I think it is Hiram Ashworth." In a second, he added the thing which would satisfy my father's curiosity. "Tell him that the bell did it."

I turned back to the vestibule and delivered the message to my father. He listened in silence, turned around, and went away. I knew he would return.

I went back to the ringing chamber. Uncle Abner still stood where I had left him. When he heard me, he looked down.

"Martin," he said, "you are twenty years old. You have helped

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Rufus more than once with slaughtering. I want you to remember that and come up here with me. What you will see is ugly, but you must realize that it is over and that it was over quickly."

As I walked forward, there was a footstep behind me. I looked around. Justice Randolph, fastidiously dressed as he often was, had come into the room.

My uncle was also aware of him. "Randolph," he said, "you must have heard what I said to Martin. Much as you might help, I suggest that you remain where you are."

Randolph looked at his cuffs. "It is bad, then, Abner?"

"It is very bad."

Randolph drew himself up. "I am not a man to shirk duty, as you know. I shall rely on your judgment in this case."

"There is much you can do here," Abner said. "Study this room carefully. What we observe might be important." He motioned to me and went up into the belfry. I followed.

The bell, said to weigh nearly three tons, hung in a chamber with louvered openings on all four sides. It was suspended from a massive timber that had an axle through it. One side of the axle went through a stout oak frame that surrounded the entire assembly. The other side of the axle went through the hub of a large wheel. The bell rope was fastened to this wheel, then guided along the wheel's rim and into the garter-hole, where it descended to the chamber below. Protruding from the timber above the bell was a stout length of wood, or stay, that checked the bell's motion and kept it from making a complete turn. All of this had been shown to anyone who was interested when the bell was hung.

When my head came above the level of the belfry floor, I avoided looking at what I must see eventually. I fixed my eyes on the bell.

This was of little help. The lip of the bell was red on one side.

In less than fifteen years we would be at war with our own countrymen from across the great mountains to the east, and we would have our own new state. Yet, of all the grim sights I saw in that conflict, none was worse than the one at Abner's feet. I choose to tell no more of it than to say that it was difficult to believe that this had been a man.

Abner saw that I was not cringing, even though I wished I were not there. "There is nothing we can do, Martin," he said. "We can go and leave this for Roberts and whoever comes with him."

"Is it Ashworth?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "See the birthmark on his right wrist."

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He stooped to point this out to me, and something caught his eye. He leaned over farther and gently pried open the hand. Something was clenched in it.

"A silver dollar," he said wonderingly. He removed the coin, held it out for me to see, then pocketed it.

A thoughtful look came over his face, and he bent over the body again. He carefully began to search the clothing. While he did this, I walked slowly about the belfry, poking idly at the slats of the louvers. One of them tipped. As I looked out, I saw a crow sitting on the peak of the church roof.

"We can go down now," Abner said.

"Was there anything else?" I asked.

"Nothing."

Randolph was still in the ringing chamber when we descended. He was carrying a gold-headed walking stick that day, and he was drawing invisible designs on the floor with it.

"I thank you for your patience," Abner said to him. "What have you found here?"

Randolph looked at the bell rope with distaste. He flicked it lightly with his stick. "This"—he pointed to the puddle on the floor—"and this." He looked around the room and pointed to a long ladder against the wall. "And that. That is all."

Abner's eyes followed as Randolph directed. "Yes. That is all. Let me see if that was enough."

He took the ladder from the wall and set it on a long slant so that it passed close to the rope. He then climbed until his head was close to the garter-hole, where the rope descended. He tilted his head and looked up through the hole. After a few seconds he came down and set the ladder to the side again. Finally, he looked at the rope, then at his hands, thoroughly.

"Have you seen enough?" Randolph asked.

"I have seen all that can be seen now," my uncle answered. "Even that is more than I was meant to see."

"Is it Ashworth up there?"

"It is."

Randolph shook his head. "The bell was almost as much his pride as it is Pendleton's. A terrible accident."

My uncle's tone was flat, but a vast cold seemed to enter the room when he spoke. "An accident? It was no accident, Randolph. And here, of all places! The Devil has entered the house of the Lord. The creature who brought him in must be found."

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Randolph considered what Uncle Abner had just said, and a shudder passed over him as he realized that act which must have happened.

"He was deliberately killed?" he whispered. "How do you know?"

"In part from the things Ashworth showed us when the bell was ready for use." He pointed up, then at the rope. "The bell is down, now. The mouth faces the floor, and the rope hangs as you see it. But when Ashworth would leave the bell ready to ring, the mouth was up, in a position like the number eleven on the clock. The rope was tied securely to the hook on the wall, over there, to keep that tremendous weight poised. When he tolled the bell, Ashworth released the rope and gave a light tug to upset the balance."

"I remember," said Randolph. "The bell then swings until the stay checks it just short of a complete circle, and the rope is used to bring it back. A skilled man can get it into the position he wants by controlling the rope. But the place where it is at rest is always a death threat to anyone in the belfrey who is close to it."

"And Ashworth would know that very well," my uncle went on. "And he would not enter the belfry unless the rope was securely tied. Today he went up for some reason we do not know. Some other person was in the ringing chamber.

"When Ashworth went up, that person set the ladder as I did. He untied the rope, but held it tightly in his hand. He climbed carefully and watched Ashworth as best he could through the hole. When the victim ventured too close to the bell, the creature below pulled the rope."

Randolph lifted his stick. "But it still could have been an accident. Perhaps the rope was not tied tightly. Perhaps Ashworth touched the bell apparatus without intending it."

Abner shook his head. "Who rang the death knell? I heard the bell hit the man, as did Martin and Rufus. The knell was rung at once. The creature knew what he had done."

"Yes," said Randolph. "I heard it, also."

We went to the vestibule to wait for my father and the undertaker's men. When we arrived, a large man dressed in black was coming through the church from the other end. The quality and cut of his cloth showed him to be at least Randolph's equal in status.

This was Pendleton, a breeder of horses. He came from an old family and had never lacked money, but he had the ability to add to it. He had always considered this talent to be a blessing, and

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when the church was built, he elected the gift of a bell in recognition of the Lord's favor to him.

He determined to choose the bell, however. "No dinner bell will hang in this belfry," he told someone. "And," referring to a sometime practice where a congregation was poor, "it will not be a used ship's bell. It will have such a voice that when the Lord calls with it, people will listen."

Most of the new churches of the time had low belfries, with no ringing chamber. The sexton stood just inside the vestibule to pull the rope. Pendleton would have none of this. He wanted a tall tower, from which the sound would carry, and that is what he got.

When he saw our group standing there, he looked from one to another of us.

"Well," he said finally, "have you come, as I did, to find out who is dead? And have you learned?"

Randolph cleared his throat. "It is Ashworth, and we have learned in a most brutal way."

Pendleton stepped back. "Ashworth? How?"

"He was hit by the descending bell," Abner replied.

The big man grasped a pew and gripped it so hard that I feared he might splinter the wood. "By my bell?" he gasped. "But he was a careful man."

"He took no precaution against murder," my uncle said.

"Murder? What enemies did he have?" Pendleton demanded. "When I had collected all the silver for the bell, then was ill for so long with the fever—who took the offering to the foundry in Baltimore? I trusted him to do that. Everyone trusted him."

Pendleton was speaking of another of his obsessions. Most bells were cast of bronze, an alloy of copper and tin. This one, its donor said, would have a clearer tone if a small amount of silver were added. He asked the congregation to join him in making a silver collection, even if a person could give no more than the smallest silver coin. The collection would be taken by him across the great mountains to Baltimore to the bell foundry.

But, as Pendleton had said, he had fallen ill and had entrusted Ashworth with the delivery.

"Even a perfect man would have at least one enemy," my uncle remarked. "There are those who would destroy such a man because he is what they can never be."

"Roberts will soon be here," said Randolph. "It would be fitting

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if Wheeler were present to say a few words before they take Ashworth away."

"He's in the southern end of the country," Pendleton said absently. "He'll return Saturday."

We were now in a time of younger preachers. Adam Bird, who had ridden circuit all his life, had suffered a stroke a year earlier. His right side was paralyzed. Bronson, his Calvinist counterpart, had died four months ago. Wheeler, the preacher of this church, did some circuit riding until a new man could be found to replace Bird.

A silence fell. There was little that anyone wanted to say in the shadow of what had happened.

Yet the silence itself was intolerable. Uncle Abner broke it, addressing Pendleton.

"Who will take Ashworth's place?"

The big man shook his tawny head. "It is too early to tell. I could ring the bell properly, but a sexton has more duties than that, and they are not for me."

"It is not work that a man would kill to get," Abner said.

"A secret," Randolph said, joining the conversation. "He had uncovered a secret that someone in the congregation did not want disclosed."

"This means that we might never learn that man's identity," my uncle said. He looked at Pendleton. "Did you see anyone in the church or leaving by the other door?"

The big man shook his head. "I saw no one, but I had only just arrived when we met."

There was a noise at the door. It was Roberts, the undertaker, and a helper carrying canvas. My father was with them. Uncle Abner left us and told them where to go and what they would find. He then took the time to explain to my father the things that had happened.

My father listened with interest. At the end, he stood thinking. Suddenly he said, "Abner, what was Ashworth doing in the belfry? Was he directed there? Was he lured there? Or might he have been there as a normal thing?"

Uncle Abner nodded. "I have been asking myself those same questions. I have no answers yet."

More footsteps sounded behind my father. Someone had come in from the street.

A man of average height, but broad-shouldered and well muscled, had stepped in from outside. He had ginger hair and side whiskers, but no mustache. His eyes were very green beside a broad, turned-

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up nose. His clothing looked fresh from the tailor, but it was serviceable, not elegant, cloth.

His name was Everett Freeman, and he came from the foundry in Baltimore where the bell was cast. He had come after the bell was hung, bringing tools to make alterations in the lip of the instrument if the tone were not true. To everyone's delight, he had declared it a perfect casting.

I was momentarily surprised to see him. He had left for Parkersburg, to the west, to discuss a bell for a new church that was to be built there. Then I realized that he had only stopped with us again on his way home.

He noticed that our greeting was polite, but little more. "There must be truth to the rumor, then," he said, watching our faces. "A terrible accident has happened here?"

"Ashworth," Pendleton answered. "The bell killed him. It swung down and hit him when he was in the belfry."

Freeman's green eyes widened. "The sexton? Surely he should have known better!"

"Unless his attention was diverted, and he forgot his caution," my uncle said.

Randolph drew himself up. "I am sure that Pendleton has a question he wants to ask. It is the same as my own. Will this terrible thing change the tone of the bell?"

"I think not," Freeman replied. "Repeated hammering with a very hard object might do that. With respect to the dead man, this should not."

"I am unacquainted with alloys," Randolph said, "but you can see in a moment what my thought is."

He turned to Abner. "I contributed a small tankard to the silver that Ashworth took to Baltimore. What did you send?"

"A handful of silver dollars," Abner replied.

"I did the same," my father said.

Pendleton laughed ruefully. "The three of you, at least, knew what you were doing. When the time came for Ashworth to go, I did a foolish thing. I arose from my sickbed."

He gestured with an idle hand. "Randolph, you have seen my camp cups, have you not?"

"Several times."

I knew what he was discussing. I had never seen these, but I had heard stories. In the Revolution, it was common for officers of sub-

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stance to carry with them a set of small, sturdy silver cups. These were used in showing hospitality to fellow officers while in camp.

The form was usually a simple cylinder about three inches high. A Philadelphia silversmith had designed the most famous ones, and craftsmen in Virginia and other colonies had copied them, with slight modifications.

"Then you know," Pendleton said to Randolph, "that, of the two I owned, I prized one above the other."

"I remember," Randolph said.

Pendleton spoke to the rest of this. "The lesser of these two cups was one of the Virginia copies. The prized cup was one of a set of twelve once owned by General Washington. The other eleven were melted to use in making a tea service when his niece married."

He looked down at the floor. "When Ashworth came for the silver collection, I rose from my sickbed to add the lesser cup to the other articles he would carry. I must have been close to delirium without realizing it. When I was well once more, many days later, I discovered that Washington's cup was gone. I still had the Virginia copy."

"An unfortunate thing, indeed," said Randolph.

Pendleton looked up, a crooked smile on his face. "Let us say that my tithe was greater than I intended."

"But no matter what was in the collection," Randolph said to Freeman, "perhaps there was enough silver to soften the metal into the final bell. Might that not change the tone after an accident such as this?"

The man from Baltimore shrugged. "I could not answer that. We do not believe in adding gold or silver to our bells. The tone is debased, not improved."

"But you say that this bell has perfect tone."

"Yes," Freeman said. "It contains no silver."

There was a silence.

It was broken by the sounds of the undertaker and his helper, laboriously carrying a canvas-wrapped object down from above and out to the street. None of us moved to follow.

At last my father stirred.

"In decency," he said, "someone should tell his widow. I can undertake that."

He had scarcely gone when Uncle Abner took a stand before Freeman.

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"You say that the bell contains no silver. Did you refuse to use it?"

The shorter man shook his head. "No silver was ever offered to us."

Pendleton started to speak angrily, but my uncle held up a massive hand.

"Did you ever see Ashworth before you met him here?"

"Yes," Freeman answered, "he came to our offices with the second payment of money. I received the last sum when I came here to observe the bell."

Pendleton finally insisted on speaking. "You say that you were given no silver. Yet Ashworth brought me two receipts—one for the money, and one itemizing the articles in the silver collection. Both receipts bore your company's name. Both were signed by you."

Freeman stroked his gingery side whiskers. "I acknowledge signing the receipt for the money. As for the other, it must be a forgery."

"A forgery?" shouted Pendleton. "By whose hand?"

"Your sexton's. I had to leave the office briefly while he was there. He could have readily stolen the receipt forms and copied my signature later."

Pendleton struck the top of a pew, nearly making the oaken floor vibrate.

"Ashworth? Never! You signed the receipt and kept the silver for yourself!"

Freeman eyed his opponent calmly. "If that were true, I would have told you that the silver was in the bell, and you would never have known otherwise."

As Pendleton sought for words, Abner turned to Randolph. "What of Ashworth? How would you value his character?"

Randolph tapped the head of his stick against his great carved ring. "Very highly. As Pendleton trusted him, so should I."

"Had he shown any change in his living habits since his return from Baltimore?"

"I have observed none," Randolph answered. "However, I seldom entertain sextons or am entertained by them."

During Abner's long friendship with Randolph, he sometimes endured momentary exasperation with the Justice. It was written on his face that one of these moments had come. Then, just as quickly, it was gone.

"I believe," he said, "that rogues have been known to hide their plunder for a long time before trying to benefit from it.

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"The thing we now face," he went on, "is the fact that things have gone beyond mere roguery. Evil has entered this house and must be rooted out."

"Can this be done, Abner?" Randolph asked.

"I believe it can," my uncle answered. "We must examine several possibilities and see which opened the door for murder."

"But we might not know them all," protested Randolph.

"That is true," Abner agreed. "Just the same, let us see what we can learn now."

"One moment," said Freeman. "You mention murder. I was unaware that a crime had been committed. It was not an accident, then?"

"It was no accident."

"I see," the ginger man said. "I had supposed that Fate had overtaken a thief."

"One of the possibilities, indeed, is that Ashworth was the thief you charge him with being," Abner said. "However, you admitted that he knew his art in the belfry and that an accident was unlikely."

"Then his thievery was discovered."

"That is truly a possibility. Who, then, would exact vengeance?"

The bell tuner looked at him shrewdly. "Anyone who was robbed and was capable of doing this thing."

"Not anyone, perhaps," my uncle said. "Some of the silver offerings were little more than a widow's mite." He turned.

"What was your tankard worth to you, Randolph, beyond the money?"

Randolph turned scarlet. "Abner! Do you accuse me?"

"Never. But this article might have been prized for itself and for being a thing of your family. If it had been stolen, and you knew the thief, how would you react?"

Randolph was a short man, but he seemed to gain in stature as he spoke. "There is justice in Virginia, and I believe in it."

"You and I are of one mind," Uncle Abner said. "What of you, Pendleton?"

"Are you mad?" the big man demanded. "I have been favored by the Lord, and I have offered my tribute for that on this spot. Would I throw it all away?"

"What if Ashworth defiled your tribute by taking away part of it?"

"The intent of my offering has surely not gone unnoticed," Pendleton growled. "It is not for me to judge."

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"But Pendleton, when you added your silver cup to the collection, you intended to add the lesser cup."

Pendleton brushed the air before him. "My error might have been caused by the fever."

"And Ashworth might have taken advantage of that fever and appropriated the Washington cup."

"So he might."

My uncle was unsmiling. "Several times this morning you have nearly tested the wood of these pews to the limit. You are not a gentle man, Pendleton."

Pendleton glared and stood squarely before Abner. "I would not have judged Ashworth. You dare not judge me!"

"Why, Pendleton," my uncle said mildly, "you have heard Randolph speak of justice and heard me agree. We have not yet heard enough to speak of meting out justice. How would you have put Ashworth into the belfry?"

Pendleton's face was blank. "To kill him? I could not tell you."

"I know how: you would have directed him to go."

"Directed him?"

"You would have come in this morning and found him here. You would have told him that something did not sound right in the belfry. You would have sent him to inspect. You have the authority."

"No," groaned the big man.

"You even know how to ring the bell. You could have tolled the death knell."

Pendleton's face mirrored unbelief. "For a thief?"

"You also have a conscience, Pendleton."

"A conscience? You are right, Abner. And it would have prevented me from even thinking of this act!"

"Perhaps," said my uncle. "There is at least one other possibility."

"Also a result of Ashworth's thievery?" Randolph asked.

"A result of Ashworth's honesty."

Uncle Abner looked at Freeman.

"What if Ashworth delivered the silver, just as he said? What if Pendleton truly gave him the Washington cup by mistake, but Ashworth believed that it was intended to be used in the bell, as an act of great sacrifice? What if he remarked on this when he handed over the collection to you? What if there were other items of some worth in that collection—a worth that was beyond their mere value in silver? Might this not present a man with temptation, Freeman?"

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The man from Baltimore laughed. "It might, and it did! It tempted this sexton, and he could not resist!"

"That is not what we are examining now," Abner said severely. "Since you evade what I have just outlined, let me speak plainer. What if you were given the silver and you kept it? What if the receipt for it is genuine?"

"You may suppose all you please," Freeman answered with indifference. "I have stated the truth, and it is not necessary for me to defend it."

"I find no fault with that," said Abner. "Yet, there are things which stand against you, and they must be tested, to see if what you have said is the truth."

"I leave that to you," Freeman said. "I have nothing more to say."

"Then I intend to go on with this assumption of Ashworth's innocence," Uncle Abner said. "I assume that he gave you the silver, and you gave him the receipt. When you came here, you forgot yourself and mentioned to someone—in Ashworth's hearing—that there was no silver in the bell. He accosted you alone somewhere and demanded to know why it was not there. When you denied that he had delivered it to you, he threatened to expose you, reminding you of the receipt.

"Probably you put him off by telling him that the company had decided not to use the metal because of its effect on the bell's tone. I can see you promising to have the silver returned, if Ashworth would not mention his unfounded suspicions. Somehow, he agreed to this because he was a man of integrity himself, and he did not want to find that men of substance lacked this quality."

"Do you commit your imaginings to paper?" Freeman asked. "Surely you are one of the greatest tellers of tales I have ever met!"

My uncle paid no heed. "When you came back from Parkersburg, it was with the intention of silencing Ashworth. You found him alone here in the church, and you trapped him into the situation that destroyed him."

Abner looked at Freeman. The man stared back, refusing to speak, as he had announced.

My uncle turned to Randolph. "Is this the silence of the innocent? Or does he fear to speak, aware that he might enmesh himself even more?"

Randolph frowned. "You have made no worse case against him than against Pendleton. Let me see if I can find any errors."

"It would help us all," my uncle replied.

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Randolph turned to Pendleton. "This man has said that he could have declared the silver was in the bell, and nobody could have disputed it. Did you ever discuss it with him?"

"No," the big man answered. "The church has the receipt, and I believed that the metal was in the alloy."

"Then, if the receipt is false, Ashworth was a thief. If it is genuine, Freeman is one, and Abner's story may be accurate."

"Randolph," said Abner, "there are two things you can do, if necessary. You can order Ashworth's house searched for the silver. If you fail to find it, you might weigh this against Freeman. If you hold Freeman on suspicion, you might request a search of his house and office in Baltimore. If the silver is found there, the evidence will favor the case I have outlined."

"There are many 'ifs.' They make me uneasy," Randolph remarked. "Why should Freeman tell anyone that there is no silver in the bell?"

"Habit," Abner said. "He has probably told many persons that silver and gold add no useful qualities to a bell. He said it here without thinking." He looked at Pendleton. "When you ordered it to be cast, what did he tell you?"

"I did not discuss anything with Freeman," the big man said. "I saw only a man named Laird. He informed me that he would later turn the matter over to Freeman."

He grimaced ruefully. "Laird tried to convince me of this same thing about the tone, but I refused to listen. I insisted on having some silver in the alloy."

Randolph spoke again to Abner. "Your case has Freeman denying to Ashworth that he ever received the silver, then telling him that the company had decided not to use it. He would see that it was returned, you said. Why should Ashworth believe the second tale, if the first was a lie?"

"We have thought Ashworth a devout man," my uncle said, "even though we might yet discover him to be a thief. If Freeman pretended repentance, especially in the Lord's own house, Ashworth might believe him."

"Last of all," said Randolph, "you have told how Pendleton could get Ashworth into the belfry. How could Freeman have done it?"

"He was Ashworth's teacher," Abner said. "When he came, he gave Ashworth instruction in ringing this huge instrument. I can see him coming here this morning and going up to the belfry first, with the sexton in the lower chamber. I can see him coming down

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and telling the man that he believes something has gone wrong with the hanging, the stay, or some other part. He wants Ashworth's opinion. He asks the man to go up to make his own inspection. Then he unleashes destruction."

Randolph pondered this. "It is a good argument. The argument against Pendleton is equally good. One final thing: why would Freeman toll the death knell?"

"He might have wished to be certain that Ashworth was dead," Abner said. "He could not know that the descending bell did more than hit a glancing blow. He rang a real stroke, then he realized that it would draw attention. He decided to complete a genuine death knell, then escaped through the other end of the church."

"I am troubled," said Randolph. "How could anyone be certain that the bell would hit Ashworth?"

Abner reached into his pocket. He drew out the silver dollar and held it for all to see.

"This was laid where Ashworth could not avoid seeing it. It was also placed where Ashworth would be squarely in the path of the bell if he picked it up. He did pick it up, as Martin can tell you. I found it in Ashworth's hand."

"Is there anything to show who put it there?" Randolph asked.

Abner seemed not to have heard. He raised his sinewy right hand and pointed upward toward the ringing chamber.

"A new rope hangs there," he thundered, "and this morning it was used to kill a man. I intend to see that it is fitted around the neck of the creature who pulled on it!"

Shock was stamped plain on Randolph's face. Usually florid, his countenance went livid.

"Abner!" he gasped. "Have you gone mad? In your heart, do you truly want the hangman to use the church's bell rope on the scaffold?"

Abner regarded him somberly. "It is already bloodstained, is it not? I only ask you to withhold your condemnation until it can be placed where it belongs.

"Each of you—hold out your hands!"

Both men complied, Pendleton slowly and reluctantly, Freeman quickly and confidently.

Both pairs of hands were clean and unmarked.

"I see nothing," said Randolph. "If the coin has left a trace on a man's hand, it must be on another. Even so, how did the coin do it?"

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"I did not say that the coin marked anyone, either visibly or invisibly," Abner replied. "Smell their hands, Randolph."

Randolph did so, first one pair, then the other. At first he seemed puzzled, then his expression changed.

"Do you understand me now, Randolph?" Uncle Abner asked. "That is a new rope, and it has its own odor. Can anyone pull with all his strength ten times on a new rope without the smell being absorbed by his skin?

"Whose hands smell of new rope?"

Even as Abner moved to seize the wretch, the Justice stepped forward and pointed.

"His!" he snapped, indicating the man from Baltimore.

DETECTIVERSE

JUST DESSERTS

by ERNEST SIEGEL

The waiter's defense—it couldn't be terser.
A diner stiffed him. And vice versa.

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"If this was marriage, she could begin to see why so many people recommended it" . . .

WHAT A TREASURE!

by CELIA DALE

Eunice Christine Hilda Bradshaw grew up in the crisply stony seaside town of Seaham with her maternal Auntie Florence, her father having been killed on active service in 1944, her mother dying of heart trouble two years later. Eunice was in her late teens by this time, studying clerical skills at the local Polytechnic. She and Auntie Florence knew each other well, as the sisters had lived near to each other, and the transference from one terrace villa to another was painless. Auntie Florence was a dressmaker, a stout exclamatory woman who had never married, and she doted on Eunice—so clever, so competent, such a churchgoer, such a sweet girl. And it was all true.

Eunice graduated through several jobs, each better than the last; and for the past twenty-seven years she had been head of the department dealing with Bereavement Claims in the Seaham branch of a national charitable organization.

She was a neat, refined woman now, neither fat nor thin, discreetly made-up (but nothing so vulgar as eye shadow—merely powder, pink lipstick, and on off days perhaps a brush of rouge); her hair was parted at the side with a half fringe and grew just a little browner with each fortnightly visit to the hairdresser.

She ran her department impeccably, with a smile and a word of praise when merited. She ran Auntie Florence's house impeccably also, especially as Auntie grew older and fatter and weaker, leaving more and more of it to Eunice and never ceasing to exclaim what a treasure she was. And she was.

She liked everything to be dainty. Frilled curtains, cushions, and aprons; flowered bed linen; potted plants in pretty containers standing on doilies; embroidered tray cloths and nightdress cases. She cooked delicious cakes, scones, puddings, even made fudge and fon-

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dants. She tried out whimsical recipes from magazines, such as Sponge Easter Bunnies, Chocolate Yule Logs, Guy Fawkes Brandy Snaps. A spot of spillage in the kitchen was whisked away in a trice, the oven was as clean as the day it was installed, the teacloths were rinsed and drying after each use, and herself and Auntie sitting in front of the television eating dainty snacks off trays daintily laid with embroidered cloths and matching flowered crockery.

"What a girl you are!" Auntie would wheeze, tucking in. "What a treasure!"

"Silly Auntie!" Eunice would murmur indulgently, "It's my pleasure."

And it was.

So when Auntie died Eunice felt it keenly. People were very kind; she had, of course, the support of the church among whose congregation she had many friends. Auntie had left the house to her and a few—a very few—thousand pounds in the bank. Eunice was due to retire the following year, when she would be sixty. The pension would not be much but she had some savings in the Building Society; she would be able to manage.

But she missed Auntie. She missed her wheezing presence, her cries of love and appreciation. She missed having an audience for her excellence; making rock cakes and peppermint creams for the Church Bazaar was not the same, glad though she was to do it, as making them for instant, face-to-face applause. She missed having someone to demonstrate her virtues to.

She had caused a rosebush to be planted for Auntie in the crematorium's Garden of Remembrance, and she was pruning it one gusty November Sunday (she visited the Garden every fortnight and preferred to look after the rosebush herself as Auntie would have liked) when she fell into conversation with a gentleman performing the same task a bush or two away. His bush was newer than hers by several months; his wife had passed away only recently—he still wore a black band on his sleeve—and had hardly any idea of how to wield his secateurs.

Eunice showed him; she had a ruthless way of pruning which would, she knew, result in a mass of dainty blooms in summer. Mr. Stafford—Stanley Stafford, retired Water Board official—was full of admiration. The wind was cold, his nose dripped slightly, so he suggested a cup of hot tea.

Eunice had never considered marriage. She knew nothing of men

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save socially (married or semi-celibate around the Church Hall) or in business (often overbearing or unreasonable, with cigarette ash everywhere and not too careful about how they emerged from the Men's Room). As a television viewer and a subscriber to the public library she had perforce had aspects of male behavior presented to her; but television sets could be switched off, and although it was becoming more and more difficult to be sure no unpleasant antics or language appeared in novels, the librarians were fairly good by now at recommending those that might not offend; and there were always books of travel and biography—although even in those one could no longer be sure nowadays, what with fertility rites and hitherto unpublished diaries.

No, men had never attracted her. They seemed, on the whole, selfish and dirty. But she did miss Auntie. And poor Mr. Stafford was so pitiful, with his sad eyes and reddish nose, trying to look after himself in the rented flat he had shared with his late wife, the lease of which was nearly up. And there was she, lonely in Auntie's two-bedroomed house.

As a lodger? That would hardly be nice—people would talk . . .

They were married quietly in the spring. Eunice wore navy blue with touches of white and Mr. Stafford wore a rose from his late wife's remembrance bush in his buttonhole. Eunice had made it quite clear from the beginning that there was to be none of "that," and Mr. Stafford had thankfully concurred. He was seventy-four and had never had much of a taste for it. He moved into Auntie's bedroom and Eunice remained in hers, and they never saw each other unless they were fully dressed. But he reveled in her competence, excellence, and daintiness (his late wife had not been much of a housekeeper), in her cheerful small talk, her tasteful presence alongside him in church or viewing telly, and in the daintily delicious meals she set before him.

He was not used to them, and when they had been married less than a year he had a coronary thrombosis and died in Intensive Care.

Eunice was shocked. The arrangement had worked so well. Stanley had been no trouble, grateful for all she did, had taken his own dirty clothes to the launderette so that she never had to handle them, had given up smoking so that there was no mess or fusty smell. He had praised her, comparing her favorably (but with good taste) with his late wife. He had been nearly as good as Auntie.

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But better than Auntie in one way; he left Eunice £9,000 and his life-insurance policy. He had, surprisingly, turned out to be rather a good investment.

She missed him. Perhaps not exactly him but the appreciation he, like Auntie, had given her. Besides, now she was retired (she had resigned at marriage but in consideration of her twenty-seven years of service the organization had not diminished her pension) she had very little to do. She would be willing—on the same terms, of course—to take on another man. And there seemed to be money in it . . .

The Garden of Remembrance was a lovesome thing, and Eunice continued to visit it as regularly as before, for she now had three rosebushes to care for—Auntie, Stanley, and Stanley's first wife (as she considered only nice). She observed the other visitors discreetly, and if a funeral were taking place she would find out who was the deceased. If it was a gentleman she took no further action. But if it was a lady she would slip into a pew at the back of the chapel and take tactful part. Afterward she joined the mourners to view the floral tributes, and some months after Stanley's death she stood in line to press the widower's hand and murmur, "I was a friend of your wife's."

"Oh, yes—thank you," he said, dazed, a small bald man in a well-cut suit, his relatives prosperous-looking.

"Perhaps, when your grief has eased, I might call on you? So many happy memories . . ."

"Thank you. So kind."

She pressed his hand and moved on. She knew who he was from the cards; his address would be in the telephone book.

This time it took longer, about eighteen months; and this time she sold Auntie's house and moved into Kenneth Gratton's handsome semidetached on the Cliff Road. The arrangement was as before: separate rooms and no intimacies. But Kenneth was not otherwise at all the same as poor Stanley had been. He had been head of a building firm and used to ordering men about and getting his own way.

Although Kenneth was small and bronchitic he had a will of concrete, drank whiskey in the evening, refused to give up his pipes, which made the whole house smell disgusting as well as leaving dottles of burned tobacco in every dainty ashtray and even on the floor. He expected her to watch Match of the Day and, horror of

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horrors, wrestling. He disliked made-up dishes, dainties of every kind; he liked fried onions, pickles, and stout.

It was no hardship at all for Eunice to drop a couple of sleeping pills into his bedtime whiskey, and when he was snoring loudly, place a pillow firmly over his face.

Kenneth did not leave her his house (he left that to his son who lived in Newcastle and took no interest in his father's affairs), but he did leave her a reasonable sum—not as much as she had expected but she realized that Kenneth had been an error of judgment in many ways, a disappointment altogether. But there was always tomorrow, and pressing yet another widower's hand the following autumn she felt her instincts could be relied on this time.

Gilbert Phelps was pale, frail, and asthmatic, almost unbecomingly eager for someone to continue taking care of him. He ate little and worried about his health and was, in fact, a very poor companion, although he possessed some sound investments and a house in the best part of Seaham which she sold at a good profit as soon as Probate was granted; it had been a happy release for them both.

Now, on the whole, she thought it would be wise to move from Seaham and start afresh elsewhere. She moved farther along the coast, into a genteel private hotel, found the local Garden of Remembrance and a neglected rosebush, and in not too long a time became Mrs. Reginald Crocker, with a nice first-floor flat overlooking the promenade and a husband who was eighty-four years old.

No one was surprised when *he* apparently died in his sleep.

As Mrs. Christine Crocker, Eunice married the following year a retired solicitor named Wilfred Jessop, who left her some more useful stocks and shares and property in Cornwall. This she sold, and with the proceeds bought herself a luxury bungalow (but big enough for two) in Redcliff-on-Sea where, as Christine Jessop, she became the wife of Bernard Barnes, company director and diabetic, whom she nursed daintily till his peaceful passing during the night not very long afterward.

Redcliff-on-Sea had a large population of senior citizens, and before long, as Hilda Barnes, she married an ex-Army man, Major Desmond Heath. She found him crying under the pergola of the Garden of Remembrance into a large handkerchief, and, as with the first, harmless Stanley, gave him comfort and accepted a cup of tea.

The Major was small and stringy; he had served under Monty at

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Alamein and liked to tell stories of how sometimes, at first glance, he had been taken for that great warrior, standing sharp and keen in his Jeep, battle-browned soldiers cheering his passing.

"Great days, marvelous days!" he would say, take out his handkerchief, and blow his nose.

He and his late wife had been living in one of Redcliff's more expensive hotels. "Never seemed to put down roots anywhere," he said. "Army life, rolling stones. Eleanor"—he gulped a little, as he always did in those early days at the mention of his late wife's name—"Eleanor was content to be an Army wife—camp follower, I used to tease her. Longed for a home though sometimes, both of us. Home is the soldier, home from the lea, And the hunter home from the hill. We were looking around, but then—left it till too late."

He absolutely agreed with Eunice's provisos. "Companionship, that's what you and I are about, isn't it, Hilda? Grow old along o' me. And to tell you the truth, that wound I got at Mersah Matruh—" He coughed, embarrassed, and Eunice changed the subject.

The Major moved in and they settled down in a way now very familiar to Eunice. As a military man, used to being on the move, he was sparse and neat in his belongings, orderly in his habits. He did not smoke, drank only one gin and tonic before supper, enjoyed gardening and the same television programmes that she did. He had a sweet tooth and appreciated her cakes and dainties. He paid her little compliments, which none of the others since Stanley had done; but chivalrous compliments, with no nasty suggestive undertone.

She really was getting to like the Major very much. He was a perfect gentleman. If this was marriage, she could begin to see why so many people recommended it: companionship, appreciation, nothing messy or disagreeable, privacy and respect, nothing that wasn't nice. She really felt she might settle for this one; marriage with the Major, growing old along o' him, no more speculative attendances at unknown funeral services, no more business prospects to consider, for surely she now had quite enough for both of them to live comfortably to the end of their days.

She was very surprised, therefore, to be wakened in the middle of a night some months after their marriage by her bedroom door being opened and footsteps padding across the floor.

"Desmond? Is that you? What on earth—?"

But he made no reply. And even if he had she wouldn't have heard it, for the pillow he pressed down on her face blanked out forever all senses save terror and panic and an outraged incredulity.

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a *NEW* Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

In which Rand, former Director of Concealed Communications (Mr. Double-C), meets a man out of the past, a man supposed to be in Russia. And when Rand "gets that look in his eyes," he reverses the usual procedure—this time it is Rand who calls on Hastings, his former superior, for help . . .

THE SPY WHO DIDN'T DEFECT

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"I can't believe we've been married four years," Leila said as they were driving toward London.

"It seems like yesterday," Rand agreed with a chuckle. A night of dinner and the theater in London was something he usually tried to avoid, but on their anniversary he'd left it to Leila to plan the night's festivities. She'd suggested dining at the Café Royal on Regent Street, followed by a visit to a nearby music hall.

As it turned out, the very pleasant dinner ran late and they emerged from the Café Royal to find a gentle November rain chilling the air. The music hall was a few blocks away and neither of them had thought to bring an umbrella. "We don't have our tickets yet anyhow, so why don't we just forget it?" Leila suggested sensibly.

Rand quickly agreed and they ducked down a narrow side street off Regent. That was how they happened to find Ibis Books, one of those quaint second-hand shops that are generally open during the early evening hours. "Let's duck in here," he suggested, "just till the rain lets up."

There were no other customers in the shop, and the gray-haired

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man behind the counter frowned as they entered, giving the impression he was about to close. While Leila went in search of books on Egyptology, Rand browsed over the used-fiction table. It was not until he glanced up, catching a glimpse of the clerk's profile, that he recognized him.

Rand edged over to Leila and said, "I think I know that man. His name is Rodney Cork and he's supposed to be in Russia."

"Perhaps you're mistaken."

"We'll see." Rand walked up to the counter and said, "You're Rodney Cork, aren't you? We worked together in the government."

The pale eyes turned blank. "I'm afraid you're mistaken, sir. My name is Withers."

Rand smiled at him. "Sorry. You look a great deal like him."

"I'm always being mistaken for people. Found anything you want?"

"No, not yet."

"I'm going to be closing in five minutes."

Rand nodded, taking the hint. "We'll be going, then. Leila, are you ready?"

As they left the shop Mr. Withers turned out the light on his sign and pulled down a shade on the door. "We were keeping him," Leila said. "I suppose it's nearly nine."

"Leila, I'm certain that man is Rodney Cork."

"He denied it?"

"He denied it, but I remember the way Rodney's eyes would go blank when someone questioned him about an unpleasant subject. This man Withers did the same thing."

"You said he's supposed to be in Russia."

"There was a scandal about five years ago, shortly before I retired from the Department of Concealed Communications. Rodney was in the Asian section and they discovered he was a double agent. I remember they took him off somewhere and questioned him for a whole week."

"Torture?"

"Who knows what they did? The story was that they finally released him because they had no hard evidence. Somehow he got out of the country and defected to Russia. We kept waiting for Moscow to present him at one of their fancy news conferences but they never did. After a time everyone just forgot about him."

"And now he's back?"

"If he ever went away."

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She could see that he was troubled. Even the continuing drizzle passed unnoticed as they reached Regent Street again. "What are you going to do?"

"Do you want to cross over and wait for me in the lobby of the Piccadilly Hotel? I won't be long, but I want to have another try at talking to him."

"All right, but remember it's our anniversary."

"I won't be long," he said again, and retraced his steps down the little side street. The bookshop was in darkness now, and for an instant he feared he was too late. Then he saw the door open and the man named Withers emerged. He turned up the collar of his coat against the drizzle and headed down the street in the opposite direction from Rand.

He walked rapidly through the night, as if to discourage interception by the occasional streetwalkers Rand saw waiting in doorways. Finally, just as Rand was about to overtake him, he turned into a darkened entrance and inserted his key in a lock. "Rodney," Rand called out softly behind him.

The man whirled, crouching slightly as if expecting an attack. Then he straightened, recognizing Rand. "Oh, it's you again."

"Rodney, I want to talk with you."

"I said I wasn't—"

"I'm not here to harm you. I just want to talk. What happened to you, Rodney? They said you went to Russia."

He snorted then and turned the key in the lock. "My room is upstairs. If you want to talk, we'll talk there."

Rand followed him up the creaking stairs to a second-floor apartment whose windows looked out on the gaudy marquee of a strip club around the corner. Withers turned on a single lamp and by its dull glow Rand became aware of how much the years had aged the man. He couldn't have been much older than Rand himself, somewhere in his mid-fifties, but the gray hair and tired eyes suggested someone a decade further along.

"Your apartment is close to work," Rand said, trying to open the conversation. "Do you like the bookshop?"

Withers shrugged. "I've been at it nearly a year now, and I get along well with the owner. The pay's not much, but they'll take care of me when I retire. There's a home called Bookrest for old book people. That's more than there is for retired spies."

"Then you never went to Russia?" Rand asked, certain now that this was Rodney Cork.

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A vague chuckle. "No, I never went to Russia." Cork's eyes seemed to blur for an instant, as he brought his mind to focus on the words. "I remember you, Rand. I recognized you the minute you entered Ibis Books. The years have been kinder to you than to me."

Rand edged forward. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"I'd have thought you knew the story. The internal security people said I was a double agent, working with Moscow. They took me away for questioning. The man in charge was someone named Grunning. I never saw him—his underlings worked on me. You knew Grunning, didn't you?"

"Only by name. I never met him."

"You can thank God for that! The man must be a devil! They took me to an abandoned mill on the Nene River and kept me there a week, trying to get information."

Rand's mouth was dry. "Did they torture you?"

"Not physically. With drugs. I was near crazy by the end of the week, seeing things that weren't there. At the end one of Grunning's men said he had orders to kill me. He pointed a gun at my head and pulled the trigger. It wasn't loaded, but that was the final—" His voice broke and his face twisted in terror at the memory. After a moment he continued, "I don't remember any more, not really. Only faceless questioners asking me the same things over and over, the same faceless people who'd tormented me all week. When I came to my senses a long time later, I was in a mental hospital. They spread the story I'd defected to Russia and kept me locked up for four years. When they let me out Ibis Books offered me a job. It was like a pension, I suppose."

"But were you working for the Russians?" Rand asked, wanting some reassurance that Rodney Cork had not been a completely innocent victim.

"To tell you the truth, I don't know. Somebody gave me some money once, and I delivered a few innocent documents on trade statistics. The sort of thing one finds in almanacs, you know. Maybe he was with the Russians. I never asked. Figured if he was foolish enough to part with his money, I was smart enough to take it."

"Why do you think they said you defected?"

Rodney Cork shrugged. "To make me look more important, I suppose. To explain my disappearance. To keep me from suing them, perhaps."

"But didn't you have a family that asked questions? A wife?"

"Sure, I had a wife then."

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"Didn't she ask about you?"

Cork smiled sadly. "My wife is the one who turned me in."

Rand had been gone longer than he'd planned, and he could see Leila was upset. "I've been sitting here for a half hour," she said.

"I'm sorry. He wanted to talk."

"On our anniversary night?"

"Can I make it up to you with a drink before we start for home?"

They went down a few steps to a little bar off the hotel lobby and ordered after-dinner drinks. Leila settled back and started to relax. "Honestly, Jeffery, I was getting some pretty strange looks in that lobby. What was so important that you had to go off with this Cork person?"

"I was simply surprised to see him. I wondered if he'd come back from Russia, but it developed he'd never gone in the first place. He told me a bit of a horror story about our boys drugging him and threatening to kill him, and then locking him away in a mental hospital for four years. Fellow named Grunning was behind it."

"Felix Grunning? You told me something about him once, something unpleasant. I remember the name."

"There was a great deal unpleasant about Grunning. I wonder whatever happened to him."

She reached out to press his hand. "You're getting that look in your eyes again. Stay away from it, Jeffery."

"There's nothing to stay away from. Just a tired old man working in a bookshop. But I might take a run into town later in the week and see Hastings."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe it's just that Cork's story is such a sad one. He took some money from a man he hardly knew, and his wife betrayed him to the authorities. Then our friend Grunning had his men spend a week shattering Cork's mind with drugs and threats. And to top it off they told the press he'd defected. An unjust story. I'd like to know if it's a true story."

Leila wasn't happy about it, but Rand took the morning train to London on Friday, having phoned Hastings in advance to suggest they lunch together. Hastings had been his superior during all those years Rand served as Director of Concealed Communications, and he still called on Rand occasionally for favors. Rand felt he deserved a bit of information in return.

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They dined expensively at Hastings' private club on St. James's Street.

"This is like old times, Rand," Hastings said, lighting a cigar as they finished eating.

"Hardly. You never took me to your club in the old days."

"Didn't I?" His smile faded a bit. "What was it you wanted to talk about?"

"Rodney Cork. Remember him?"

"Cork? Went off to Russia, didn't he?"

"No," Rand said. "He's a clerk at Ibis Books, a shop off Regent Street."

"Is that so?"

"I had a chat with him the other night. He has an alarming story to tell. It's a wonder he doesn't bring a lawsuit against the government."

"Oh, I don't think he could do that."

"Tell me, is Felix Grunning still in the service?"

"Grunning? Not any more. He did contract work for counterintelligence. Mainly internal security checks. But he was a bad customer, a real sadist. I don't know what happened to him."

"They used him on Cork. Grunning's men drove Cork out of his mind with drugs and psychological torture. He was in a mental hospital all the time the papers were saying he'd defected to Russia."

"That was out of my department. They said he defected and I believed them. I didn't ask questions."

"Come on, Hastings! You always knew everything that was going on! And what about Cork's wife?"

"What about her?"

"Did she know the truth of what happened to him?"

"She didn't care, Rand—it was she who turned him in. Probably easier in her mind than going through a divorce."

"But they're divorced now?"

"Oh, yes. I understand Mrs. Cork has remarried."

"I think I'd like to see her."

"What in God's name for? Why dredge up this old business?"

"The man was done an injustice, Hastings, and you know it. Whatever he did, he didn't defect to Russia. I think it's time we corrected the records."

"You want to rewrite history?"

"If it's wrong, yes."

"Who cares if it's wrong, Rand? Five years is a lifetime in our

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game. The public doesn't even remember Rodney Cork or what he did. You stir things up and you may get a Sunday feature in the *Telegraph*, but then it'll all be forgotten again and Cork will still be working in the bookshop. He probably won't thank you for it, either. He's anonymous now and I'll wager he'd like to stay that way."

"We'll see," Rand said. "I'll ask him."

After lunch he walked up St. James's to Piccadilly and then cut through Swallow to Regent Street. It was only a few minutes' walk to Ibis Books and he hoped he would find Rodney Cork in the shop. But a tall man wearing thick glasses was behind the counter instead. "Can I help you?" he asked.

"I'm looking for Withers," Rand said.

"He's off this afternoon. I'm Mr. Ibis."

Rand smiled. "I didn't realize there was a Mr. Ibis. My wife thought the name had an Egyptian connotation."

"We do try to stock Egyptian books," Ibis said. "Did she look in the basement?"

"No. We'll catch up next time."

Rand left the shop and walked down the side street toward Rodney Cork's apartment. He pressed the buzzer under the name *Withers* and after a moment the outside door was released. Upstairs he found Cork waiting in the doorway. "Oh. It's you again," he said without emotion.

If Cork was not surprised to see him, Rand had a surprise as he stepped into the room. The gray-haired man was not alone. A woman of about thirty, heavily made up and dressed somewhat like the streetwalkers in the doorways, stood by the window. "And who's this?" she asked.

"Mr. Rand," Cork said. "We were together in the government."

"Pleased to meet you." The woman extended her carefully manicured hand. "I'm Milly Martin. I work across the street."

"Across—?" Then Rand remembered the strip club he'd seen from the window. "Oh, of course."

"Does he know?" she asked Cork.

"He knows."

She turned back to Rand. "Rodney told me what they did to him. I want him to go to the press about it."

"I agree something should be done," Rand murmured.

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"This person Grunning—he must have been a beast! To think our government employs people like that is more than I can stomach."

"How long have you known Rodney?"

It was Cork who answered. "A few months, but I just told her my story the other night, after you were here."

They seemed such an unlikely pair that Rand had trouble accepting the evidence of his eyes. Perhaps she really felt sorry for him. "I told Rodney I'm writing a letter," she said. "I'm going to stir things up."

"That might not be such a good idea," Rand cautioned. "I'm sure they can find a clause in the Official Secrets Act to shut you up." Then he remembered the reason for his visit. "Rodney, I wonder if I might call on your former wife."

"What for?"

"I'd like to get her view of what happened to you. After all, she was the one who reported you to the authorities."

"I haven't seen her since I came back to London. Haven't seen her since any of it happened, in fact. She's remarried now."

"What's her new name?"

"Teresa Spann. She wrote me at the hospital after they were married, but I never replied."

"Do you remember her address?"

"Somewhere on Addison Road, if that's any help."

"Kensington?"

"Farther up. Probably Notting Hill."

"I'll find it," Rand said. "Pleased to meet you, Miss Martin."

She gave him a tired smile. "Come see my show some night. I go on at ten."

"I'll do that."

He could hear them talking again as he closed the door and went downstairs.

It did not take Rand long to find the address on Addison Road. The short dumpy woman who answered his ring stared at him suspiciously before admitting, "Yes, I was Teresa Cork, but that was a long time ago. I'm divorced now, and remarried."

"Who is it, Teresa?" a male voice called from inside. It hadn't occurred to Rand that her husband might be at home.

"Some man looking for Teresa Cork," she called back.

That was enough to bring him forward. He was as tall as Rand and ruggedly handsome, perhaps a bit younger than Teresa though

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Rand couldn't be sure. Like Rodney and Milly, they made an odd couple. "I'm Walter Spann, the lady's husband. Can I help you?"

Rand introduced himself. "I once worked with Rodney Cork and I ran into him the other day."

"Here in London? That's impossible," his former wife exclaimed.

"I think you know better, Mrs. Spann. May I come in and talk for a few minutes?"

She glanced at her husband and then stepped aside to let Rand pass. "It can't be long. We're going out."

Rand sat down facing them. The living room was well furnished and he wondered what Spann did for a living. "I'll be as brief as I can, Mrs. Spann. I don't believe your first husband was a conscious Russian agent. And he certainly never defected to Moscow as the papers said. He was right here in England all the time, recovering from a really terrible week of drug-induced mental torture. But I think you know most of this already, don't you?"

Her face had hardened, but now with the indoor shadows across it Rand could see that she'd been pretty once. Perhaps as recently as five years ago she'd been pretty enough to attract a man like Walter Spann. "I know nothing," she said. "Nothing but what the newspapers said."

"Come, Mrs. Spann! After he accepted money for delivering those documents, it was you who notified the authorities."

"I was frightened I'd be arrested as an accessory. In America Rosenberg's wife went to the electric chair with him."

"We don't have an electric chair in England, Mrs. Spann. We don't even have capital punishment at the present time." All we have, he thought silently, is a week at the old mill with Felix Grunning and his henchmen.

"My wife has nothing to say about it," Walter Spann said. "You'd better go now."

But Rand wasn't giving up that easily. "You knew he was in a mental hospital, didn't you, Mrs. Spann? He said you wrote him there to tell him you'd remarried."

"It's not my responsibility," she insisted. "What is it you want, anyhow?"

"The truth," Rand said. "Only the truth. The man deserves that much after all he's been through."

"I can't help you," she said firmly.

"Do you know a man named Felix Grunning?"

She hesitated only a second. "No, why should I?"

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"He was responsible for your husband's torture, Mrs. Spann."

"Things like that don't happen in England," her husband insisted.

"No? Ask some of the people arrested in Northern Ireland. Ask some of the Americans who had similar experiences with their own intelligence services. Things like that can happen anywhere so long as no one speaks out against them."

"What is it you want?" Teresa Spann asked again.

"When the time comes, will you tell what you know about Rodney Cork's case?"

She took a deep breath. "I don't know, Mr. Rand. I really don't know."

He brooded about Cork over the weekend, puttering purposelessly about the house and barking at Leila when she suggested they drive into Reading for dinner one night. "Is it still that business with Rodney Cork?" she asked him finally.

"I'm afraid so," he admitted.

"It isn't really your affair, is it?"

"Leila, the man was branded a defector, when in truth he was drugged out of his mind and locked away in a mental hospital. Our government used a ruthless, sadistic man named Grunning to try, convict, and punish a man who might well have been innocent—or at least an innocent pawn."

"He took money, didn't he?"

"Yes," Rand admitted.

"He should have realized the consequences of his act."

"Do people always stop to realize the consequences of the things they do? Did I realize the consequences of following Rodney Cork to his room last week?"

Leila had no answer for that.

On Monday afternoon Hastings phoned from London, taking Rand away from his typewriter. The voice on the phone was cool and formal, and came right to the point.

"Rand, a woman named Milly Martin has been writing letters. Do you know of her?"

"I met her once, last week. She's employed at a strip club round the corner from Rodney Cork's flat. I gather they've become friends."

"Where is that?"

"On the edge of Soho, east of Regent Street. I'm sure you have Cork's address in your files, if not on the desk in front of you."

Hastings sighed. "You may not believe this, Rand, but the entire

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Cork matter was handled elsewhere. I knew as little as you did at the time. When I learned what happened it was long after the fact."

"But you're uncomfortable now that Milly Martin and I are stirring things up."

"Of course I'm uncomfortable! The thing happened five years ago, Rand. It's dead and buried!"

"Rodney Cork isn't dead and buried. He's very much alive, and in need of fair play for once."

"They were a bit rough with him, I'll admit that. But consider the alternative, Rand. A long messy trial for treason, his name dragged through the press—"

"Almost as bad as being branded a defector."

"Look, Rand, call off this Martin woman."

"Is that an order?"

Hastings hesitated. "You're not in a position where I can give you orders. It's a request from a friend."

"What about Grunning?"

"What about him? We don't employ him any more. I don't know where he is."

"Then why are you protecting him?"

"I'm not, Rand. I'm protecting the department."

"And I'm protecting Rodney Cork."

"Call her off. When things quiet down maybe we can arrange some sort of pension for him."

"Nice of you."

"Rand, for God's sake—"

"All right, I'll have a talk with her."

Rand took the evening train into London, over Leila's objections, and then hailed a taxi for the strip club where Milly Martin performed.

He remembered she'd said she went on at ten o'clock, and it was nearly that when he reached the place. There was a dim light burning in Rodney Cork's window, but Rand went straight to the club, finding a place at the bar from which he could watch the performance. He'd bought a temporary membership at the door, complying with the fiction that this was a private club.

There were two girls on before Milly, and Rand found their performances boring and unsexy. They seemed tired and anxious to be done with it. When Milly Martin took the stage, with a suitable fanfare of drums, there was some improvement. But Rand couldn't

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help noting the lines of age beginning to show on her body. Pink lights and powder couldn't quite hide them.

When she went off he paid for his drink and followed her backstage. The corridor was narrow and badly lit, and it took him a few minutes to locate her dressing room. The door was partly open and when she didn't reply to his knock he stepped inside. What he saw there made him shut the door quickly behind him.

Milly Martin was sprawled on the floor between her chair and the dressing table, with her neck at an angle that told Rand it was broken. He'd seen people killed like that before—it was a trick the British government had taught commandoes during the war, and secret agents ever since.

The dressing-room window was open, and he saw at once that it faced an alley. The killer had simply waited until she walked into the room after her act. Then he'd gone out the window.

Someone hadn't waited for Rand to talk with her. It might have been any number of people employed by Hastings, but somehow Rand doubted it. He'd known Hastings for half of a lifetime, and he trusted him.

It seemed far more likely that Felix Grunning was back in town.

Rand exited by the alley window, dropping silently to the ground and making his way quickly back to Regent Street. He didn't want to see Rodney Cork now, not with this latest tragedy still unknown to him. Instead, he took a taxi to Paddington Station and caught the last train home. Leila was already in bed, just dozing off, and he delayed telling her what had happened.

In the morning as they were finishing breakfast, Hastings arrived. This time he hadn't bothered to telephone first. "I drove here directly from home," he told Rand. "That woman Milly Martin was murdered last evening at the strip club where she worked."

Rand decided to keep quiet about finding the body, at least for the present. "Any idea who did it?" he asked.

"A damn good idea. The police found a pay voucher from Ibis Books under the body. It was made out in the name of Withers."

"That's the name Cork uses. You can't believe he killed her!"

"He knew her. They might even have been lovers. He'd been seen backstage and in her dressing room on any number of occasions. The blow that killed her is one that Cork would have learned while in our service."

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"Felix Grunning would have learned it too," Rand pointed out.

"Why would Grunning want to kill her?"

"Because she was raking over old coals, threatening to go to the press."

"So were you."

"But she was easier to kill. Maybe he thinks it'll be a warning to me. And of course if he can frame Rodney Cork for it he has him out of the way too."

"That's reaching, Rand. Accept the obvious. Rodney Cork killed her."

"Has he been arrested?"

"The police are questioning him now. He claims he was alone in his room at the time of the killing."

"It certainly has diverted attention from Cork's story." There was a trace of bitterness in Rand's voice.

"I drove out here to tell you personally," Hastings said quietly. "We've been through a great deal together. I don't want our friendship to end like this."

"Tell me one thing, Hastings. Where is Felix Grunning?"

"I don't know."

"And you don't care—right?"

"Grunning wasn't my concern, Rand. He was with counterintelligence."

"And that mill on the Nene where he took Cork?"

"Yes, I know that place. It was a safe house we used occasionally." He spread his hands to Rand. "I'm not condoning what happened to Cork at that mill. What I'm trying to say is that it did happen and it left him mentally unbalanced. He killed this woman and he might kill again."

Rand had a thought. "If he hasn't been charged yet, you could have him released in your custody."

"Why would I do such a foolish thing?"

"Because I ask you to."

"Rand, what—?"

"I want to take him back to that mill, Hastings. If he's as crazy as you claim, a trip back there should set him off. I'll know if he was capable of killing Milly Martin."

"He might well kill you."

"That's a chance I'll take," Rand said.

It was later in the day, toward evening, when he found himself

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driving north with Rodney Cork in the seat beside him. The mill on the Nene River was a ninety-minute drive north of London. Hastings had located it on the map for Rand, and then warned him again of the foolhardiness of what he was doing. "If you let him escape, Rand, you'll be held personally responsible."

"Why should he try to escape? He's innocent."

But on the long drive north Rand couldn't help questioning Cork about the events of the previous night. Cork had been willing to return to the mill, pausing only long enough to phone the bookshop and tell Ibis he'd be in to work the following day. His release from questioning seemed to buoy his spirits, though Rand was careful to warn him that he wasn't out of the woods yet.

"They still regard you as the prime suspect," he said as the car headed north through the deepening dusk.

"I know that," Cork replied. "But I didn't kill her. I was in my room."

"They found your pay voucher under the body."

"I always keep the check and throw away the voucher."

"Who would have wanted to kill her, Rodney? Might your former wife have been jealous of her?"

"Teresa? Fat chance of that! I told you I haven't laid eyes on her for five years. You were going to see her the other day. Did you?"

"Yes," Rand admitted. "She wasn't too cooperative. She didn't want to get involved in reopening your case."

"Did you meet her husband?"

"Yes."

"What's he like?" Cork asked.

"Nothing special. A fellow named Walter Spann. Tall, ordinary-looking."

Rodney Cork grunted and fell silent. After a time he asked, "Why are you bringing me up here, Rand?"

"I thought I'd told you. I want you to remember more about what happened during that week they interrogated you. By seeing the place again you may be able to fill in important details. Once I have the full story I plan to make it public."

"Oh, they'd never let you do that.

"Hastings wouldn't stop me."

"No, but Felix Grunning would."

"Grunning is gone. He's not in the service any more."

"Grunning will never be gone."

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Rand glanced sideways at him, wondering just how much his mind was still affected by what he'd been through five years earlier.

"Why do you say—?"

But Rodney Cork interrupted to tell him, "Here's where you turn. This is the road to the mill."

"You remember."

"I remember."

Rand turned off the pavement and onto a dirt road that led through the trees. It was almost dark now and his headlights illuminated an old building a few hundred feet ahead. He pulled up and parked. "The river is over there," Cork said, pointing beyond the mill. "I used to see it in the mornings when I came awake, before Grunning's men gave me my daily injection and started the questioning."

They left the car and walked up the wooden steps. Rand had brought a flashlight and he pointed it ahead of them. He felt the strands of a cobweb against his face and brushed them aside. "The place hasn't been used in a long time."

The door was unlocked, as Hastings had said it would be. It was no longer a safe house, if it ever had been for people like Rodney Cork. "My bed was in here," Cork said. "I remember that. And when the hallucinations started I was handcuffed to it. Grunning's men said—"

"Quiet!" Rand cautioned. He'd heard a sound, some other movement in the building. He snapped off his flashlight and listened.

"We're not alone!" Rodney Cork said. "You tricked me into coming here, didn't you, Rand? You still work for them. You brought me here for Grunning!" His voice was rising, out of control.

"Calm down, Rodney. Nothing's going to happen to you. Grunning is far away."

And then a sudden light cut through the darkness, accompanied by a harsh voice. "Not so far away as you might think, Mr. Rand."

Rand felt a chill on his spine. "Who is that?"

"My name is Felix Grunning," the voice behind the light said. Rand started forward and the voice commanded, "Stay there! I have a gun!"

Rand took a deep breath. He couldn't believe Hastings had betrayed them by telling Grunning they were coming to the mill. "You killed Milly Martin," Rand said simply.

"She was stirring up old issues, as were you, Rand. I don't want my face in all the papers."

"You're going to kill us too?" Rand asked.

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"The mill will catch fire and burn down. A tragic accident."

Rand felt the weight of the flashlight still in his hand. It was his only weapon.

But before he could move Rodney Cork launched himself forward, shouting, "You killed her, Grunning! And your men destroyed me! Now it's my turn!"

Grunning's gun fired twice and Rand saw Cork's body jerk with the impact of the bullets. But he kept going toward his target.

Then suddenly the mill was ablaze with light and Rand heard Hastings shouting something from behind him. He saw Rodney Cork with his stiff hands slashing at the other's neck.

But most of all he saw that face, the face of Felix Grunning.

It was the face of Mr. Ibis.

"They're both dead," Hastings told him moments later. "My God, Cork kept going with two bullets in his chest. Did you see what he did to Grunning's neck?"

"He killed him the way Grunning killed Milly," Rand said tiredly. "There are some techniques one never forgets."

"If only we'd gotten here a minute sooner!"

"Did you know Mr. Ibis was Grunning?"

"Ibis? The man Cork worked for?"

"Exactly."

Hastings shook his head. "How could that be?"

"I should have guessed it from that pay voucher they found under Milly's body. If Cork threw it away when he received his check, as he said, Ibis was the most likely one to retrieve it and leave it under the body. He figured he'd get Milly and Cork both out of the way, but when Cork was released and telephoned him he'd be in to work tomorrow, Ibis knew he'd have to intercept us both up here."

"Cork told him he was coming here?"

"He must have." Rand rubbed a hand over his eyes, trying to sort it all out. He was aware that the men with Hastings were taking care of the bodies, but he didn't watch. "Cork told me at the beginning that his questioners were faceless that terrible week. He never saw Grunning's face, never heard Grunning's voice—or he'd have recognized it in the bookshop. It must have been some quirk of Grunning's that made him seek out Cork and offer him that job when the mental hospital released him."

"Do you believe that?" Hastings asked.

"I don't know what to believe," Rand said, wanting to get out of

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the building, into the fresh air. "I only know three people are dead because I recognized Rodney Cork in a bookshop."

"Don't blame yourself. I should have been here sooner in case something like this happened. But I never expected Grunning to show up." Hastings followed Rand outdoors. "Perhaps Grunning and Cork both wanted to die, in their own ways. When Grunning hired Cork out of the mental hospital, he might have been subconsciously hiring his executioner. And when Cork took the job, he might have been subconsciously wanting to commit suicide. If Grunning hadn't killed the woman it might have gone on like that for years—a slow death for both of them."

There was nothing more to say, but Rand thought about Rodney Cork for many weeks after that. He waited for the full story to come out in the press, but of course it never did.

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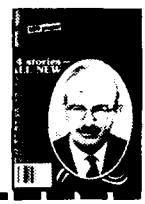

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(continued from page 162)

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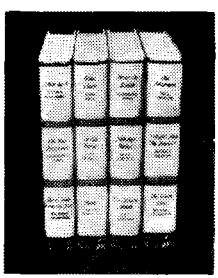

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